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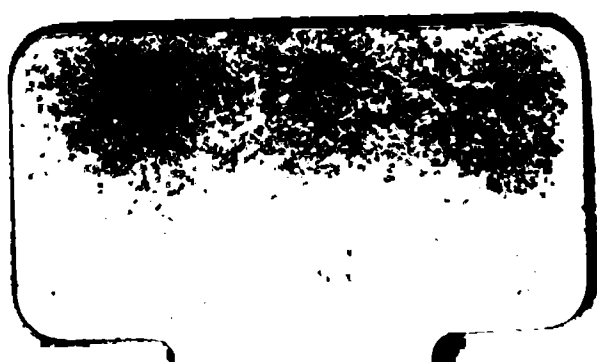
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PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

HAZLITT'S PLAIN SPEAKER.

ESSAYS ON

*THE PROSE STYLE OF POETS.
DREAMS.*

*THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS.
REASON AND IMAGINATION.*

APPLICATION TO STUDY.

LONDONERS AND COUNTRY PEOPLE.

THE SPIRIT OF OBLIGATIONS.

THE OLD AGE OF ARTISTS.

ENVY.

SITTING FOR ONE'S PICTURE.

IS GENIUS CONSCIOUS OF ITS POWERS?

EDITED BY

WILLIAM CAREW HAZLITT.

LONDON:

BEIL & DALDY, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1870.

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THE PLAIN SPEAKER.

THE
PLAIN SPEAKER:

OPINIONS
ON
BOOKS, MEN, AND THINGS.

BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT,
*Author of "Table Talk;" Lectures "On the Comic Writers;" "On the
English Poets;" "Characters of Shakspeare's Plays;"
"On Elizabethan Literature," &c. &c.*

[Pt. 1.]

A NEW EDITION,
EDITED BY
WILLIAM CAREW HAZLITT.

LONDON:
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1870.

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P R E F A C E.

IN two small octavoes, with the date 1825, appeared at Paris an edition of *Table-Talk*, which in fact was not correspondent in its contents, although it was in its title, with the work of the same name published in London, and already included in our Series. The Paris impression of *Table-Talk*, issued by Galignani, was really a selection from *Table-Talk* and the *Plain Speaker*, and was intended to comprise the best portions of both. It was something more than a bookseller's speculation, for to it was prefixed the following Advertisement, by the Author, declaring *its* and *his* object:—

“The work here offered to the public is a selection from the four volumes of *Table-Talk* printed in London. Should it meet with success, it will be followed by two other volumes of the same description, which will include all that the Author wishes to preserve of his writings in this kind. The title may perhaps serve to explain what there is of peculiarity in the style or mode of treating the subjects. I had remarked that when I had written or thought upon a particular topic, and afterwards had occasion to speak of it with a friend, the conversation generally took a much wider range, and branched off into a number of indirect and collateral questions, which were not strictly connected with the original view of the subject, but which often threw a curious and striking light upon it, or upon human life in general. It therefore occurred to me as possible to combine the advantages of

these two styles, the *literary* and *conversational*; or, after stating and enforcing some leading idea, to follow it up by such observations and reflections as would probably suggest themselves in discussing the same question in company with others. This seemed to me to produce a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method. The same consideration had an influence on the familiarity and conversational idiom of the style which I have used. How far the plan was feasible, or how far I have succeeded in the execution of it, must be left to others to decide. I am also afraid of having too frequently attempted to give a popular air and effect to subtle distinctions and trains of thought; so that I shall be considered as too metaphysical by the careless reader, while by the more severe and scrupulous inquirer my style will be complained of as too light and desultory. To all this I can only answer that I have done not what I wished, but the best I could do; and I heartily wish it had been better."

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE *Plain Speaker* appeared anonymously in the year 1826 in two octavo volumes. It was reprinted with the omission of one of the Essays, in 1851, 2 vols., 12mo. It is now faithfully reproduced from the best edition; and the extracts from books have been collated. A few explanatory Notes have also been given.

W. C. H.

Kensington, October 15, 1869.

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THE PLAIN SPEAKER.

*On the Prose Style of Poets.*¹

“Do you read or sing? If you sing, you sing very ill.”

I HAVE but an indifferent opinion of the prose-style of poets: not that it is not sometimes good, nay, excellent; but it is never the better, and generally the worse, from the habit of writing verse. Poets are winged animals, and can cleave the air, like birds, with ease to themselves and delight to the beholders; but like those “feathered, two-legged things,” when they light upon the ground of prose and matter-of-fact, they seem not to have the same use of their feet.

What is a little extraordinary, there is a want of *rhythmus* and cadence in what they write without the help of metrical rules. Like persons who have been accustomed to sing to music, they are at a loss in the absence of the habitual accompaniment and guide to their judgment. Their style halts, totters, is loose, disjointed, and without expressive pauses or rapid movements. The measured cadence and regular *sing-song* of rhyme or blank verse have destroyed, as it were, their natural ear for the

¹ The original MS. of this Essay is now before me, and exhibits occasional variations from the printed copy; the latter, however, may be presumed to contain the more authoritative text and the writer's latest corrections.—ED.

mere characteristic harmony which ought to subsist between the sound and the sense. I should almost guess the Author of *Waverley* to be a writer of ambling verses from the desultory vacillation and want of firmness in the march of his style. There is neither *momentum* nor elasticity in it; I mean as to the *score*, or effect upon the ear. He has improved since in his other works: to be sure, he has had practice enough.¹ Poets either get into this incoherent, undetermined, shuffling style, made up of "unpleasing flats and sharps," of unaccountable starts and pauses, of doubtful odds and ends, flirted about like straws in a gust of wind; or, to avoid it and steady themselves, mount into a sustained and measured prose (like the translation of Ossian's *Poems*, or some parts of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*) which is more odious still, and as bad as being at sea in a calm. Dr. Johnson's style (particularly in his *Rambler*) is not free from the last objection. There is a tune in it, a mechanical recurrence of the same rise and fall in the clauses of his sentences, independent of any reference to the meaning of the text, or progress or inflection of the sense. There is the alternate roll of his cumbrous cargo of words; his periods complete their revolutions at certain stated intervals, let the matter be longer or shorter, rough or smooth, round or square, different or the same. This monotonous and balanced mode of composition may be compared to that species of portrait-painting which prevailed about a century ago, in which each face was cast in a regular and preconceived mould. The eyebrows were arched mathematically as if with a pair of com-

¹ Is it not a collateral proof that Sir Walter Scott is the Author of *Waverley*, that ever since these novels began to appear, his Muse has been silent, till the publication of *Halidon Hill*?

[On the back of the first leaf of this Essay, in the MS., are several loose jottings, as follow: *Recondite style—Word mem.—Vacillation—Shambling—Instance out of Waverley.—ED.*]

passes, and the distances between the nose and mouth, the forehead and chin, determined according to a "foregone conclusion," and the features of the identical individual were afterwards accommodated to them, how they could!¹

Horne Tooke used to maintain that no one could write a good prose style, who was not accustomed to express himself *vivâ voce*, or to talk in company. He argued that this was the fault of Addison's prose, and that its smooth, equable uniformity, and want of sharpness and spirit, arose from his not having familiarised his ear to the sound of his own voice, or at least only among his friends and admirers, where there was but little collision, dramatic fluctuation, or sudden contrariety of opinion to provoke animated discussion, and give birth to different intonations and lively transitions of speech. His style (in this view of it) was not indented, nor did it project from the surface. There was no stress laid on one word more than another—it did not hurry on or stop short, or sink or swell with the occasion: it was throughout equally insipid, flowing, and harmonious, and had the effect of a studied recitation rather than of a natural discourse. This would not have happened (so the Member for Old Sarum contended) had Addison laid himself out to argue at his club, or to speak in public; for then his ear would have caught the necessary modulations of sound arising out of the feeling of the moment, and he would have transferred them unconsciously to paper. Much might be said on both sides of this question:² but Mr. Tooke was himself an unintentional confirmation of his own argument; for the tone of his written compositions is as flat and unraised

¹ See the Portraits of Kneller, Richardson, and others.

² Goldsmith was not a talker, though he blurted out his good things now and then: yet his style is gay and voluble enough. Pope was also a silent man; and his prose is timid and constrained, and his verse inclining to the monotonous.

as his manner of speaking was hard and dry. Of the poet it is said by some one, that

He murmurs by the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own.

On the contrary, the celebrated person just alluded to might be said to grind the sentences between his teeth which he afterwards committed to paper, and threw out crusts to the critics, or *bon-mots* to the Electors of Westminster (as we throw bones to the dogs) without altering a muscle, and without the smallest tremulousness of voice or eye! ¹ I certainly so far agree with the above theory as to conceive that no style is worth a farthing that is not calculated to be read out, or that is not allied to spirited conversation: but I at the same time think the process of modulation and inflection may be quite as complete, or more so, without the external enunciation; and that an author had better try the effect of his sentences on his stomach than on his ear. He may be deceived by the last, not by the first. No person, I imagine, can dictate a good style, or spout his own compositions with impunity. In the former case, he will flounder on before the sense or words are ready, sooner than suspend his voice in air; and in the latter, he can supply what intonation he pleases, without consulting his readers. Parliamentary speeches sometimes read well aloud; but we do not find, when such persons sit down to write, that the prose-style of public speakers and great orators is the best, most natural, or varied of all others. It has almost always either a professional twang, a mechanical rounding off, or else is stunted and unequal. Charles Fox was the most rapid

¹ As a singular example of steadiness of nerves, Mr. Tooke on one occasion had got upon the table at a public dinner to return thanks for his health having been drunk. He held a bumper of wine in his hand, but he was received with considerable opposition by one party, and at the end of the disturbance, which lasted for a quarter of an hour, he found the wine glass still full to the brim.

and even *hurried* of speakers; but his written style halts and creeps slowly along the ground.¹ A speaker is necessarily kept within bounds in expressing certain things, or in pronouncing a certain number of words, by the limits of the breath or power of respiration: certain sounds are observed to join in harmoniously or happily with others: an emphatic phrase must not be placed where the power of utterance is enfeebled or exhausted, &c. All this must be attended to in writing (and will be so unconsciously by a practised hand), or there will be *hiatus in manuscriptis*. The words must be so arranged, in order to make an efficient readable style, as “to come trippingly off the tongue.” Hence it seems that there is a natural measure of prose in the feeling of the subject and the power of expression in the voice, as there is an artificial one of verse in the number and co-ordination of the syllables; and I conceive that the trammels of the last do not (where they have been long worn) greatly assist the freedom or the exactness of the first.

Again, in poetry, from the restraints in many respects, a greater number of inversions, or a latitude in the trans-

¹ I have been told, that when Sheridan was first introduced to Mr. Fox, what cemented an immediate intimacy between them was the following circumstance. Mr. Sheridan had been the night before to the House of Commons; and being asked what his impression was, said he had been principally struck with the difference of manner between Mr. Fox and Lord Stormont. The latter began by declaring in a slow, solemn, drawling, nasal tone that “when he considered the enormity and the unconstitutional tendency of the measures just proposed, he was hurried away in a torrent of passion and a whirlwind of impetuosity,” pausing between every word and syllable; while the first said (speaking with the rapidity of lightning, and with breathless anxiety and impatience), that “such was the magnitude, such the importance, such the vital interest of this question, that he could not help imploring, he could not help adjuring the House to come to it with the utmost calmness, the utmost coolness, the utmost deliberation.” This trait of discrimination instantly won Mr. Fox’s heart.

position of words is allowed, which is not conformable to the strict laws of prose. Consequently, a poet will be at a loss, and flounder about for the common or (as we understand it) *natural* order of words in prose-composition. Dr. Johnson endeavoured to give an air of dignity and novelty to his diction by affecting the order of words usual in poetry. Milton's prose has not only this drawback, but it has also the disadvantage of being formed on a classic model. It is like a fine translation from the Latin; and indeed, he wrote originally in Latin. The frequency of epithets and ornaments, too, is a resource for which the poet finds it difficult to obtain an equivalent. A direct, or simple prose-style seems to him bald and flat; and instead of forcing an interest in the subject by severity of description and reasoning, he is repelled from it altogether by the absence of those obvious and meretricious allurements by which his senses and his imagination have been hitherto stimulated and dazzled. Thus there is often at the same time a want of splendour and a want of energy in what he writes, without the invocation of the Muse—*invita Minervâ*. It is like setting a rope-dancer to perform a tumbler's tricks—the hardness of the ground jars his nerves; or it is the same thing as a painter's attempting to carve a block of marble for the first time—the coldness chills him, the colourless uniformity distracts him, the precision of form demanded disheartens him. So in prose-writing, the severity of composition required damps the enthusiasm, and cuts off the resources of the poet. He is looking for beauty, when he should be seeking for truth; and aims at pleasure, which he can only communicate by increasing the sense of power in the reader. The poet spreads the colours of fancy, the illusions of his own mind, round every object, *ad libitum*; the prose-writer is compelled to extract his materials patiently and bit by bit, from his subject. What he adds of ornament, what he borrows from the pencil, must be sparing, and judi-

ciously inserted. The first pretends to nothing but the immediate indulgence of his feelings: the last has a remote practical purpose. The one strolls out into the adjoining fields or groves to gather flowers: the other has a journey to go, sometimes through dirty roads, and at others through untrodden and difficult ways. It is this effeminacy, this immersion in sensual ideas, or craving after continual excitement that spoils the poet for his prose-tasks. He cannot wait till the effect comes of itself, or arises out of the occasion: he must force it upon all occasions, or his spirit droops and flags under a supposed imputation of dulness. He can never drift with the current, but is always hoisting sail, and has his streamers flying. He has got a striking simile on hand; he *lugs* it in with the first opportunity, and with little connexion, and so defeats his object. He has a story to tell: he tells it in the first page, and where it would come in well, has nothing to say; like Goldsmith, who having to wait upon a Noble Lord, was so full of himself and of the figure he should make, that he addressed a set speech, which he had studied for the occasion, to his Lordship's butler, and had just ended as the nobleman made his appearance.¹ The prose-ornaments of the poet are frequently beautiful in themselves, but do not assist the subject. They are pleasing excrescences—hindrances, not helps in an argument. The reason is, his embellishments in his own walk grow out of the subject by natural association; that is, beauty gives birth to kindred beauty, grandeur leads the mind on to greater grandeur. But in treating a common subject, the link is truth, force of illustration, weight of argument, not a graceful harmony in the immediate ideas; and hence the obvious and habitual clue which before guided him is gone, and he hangs on his patchwork, tinsel finery at random, in despair, without

¹ The Duke of Northumberland; the story is too well known to bear repetition.—ED.

propriety, and without effect. The poetical prose-writer stops to describe an object, if he admires it, or thinks it will bear to be dwelt on: the genuine prose-writer only alludes to or characterises it in passing, and with reference to his subject. The prose-writer is master of his materials: the poet is the slave of his style. Everything showy, everything extraneous tempts him, and he reposes idly on it: he is bent on pleasure, not on business. He aims at effect, at captivating the reader, and yet is contented with commonplace ornaments, rather than none. Indeed, this last result must necessarily follow, where there is an ambition to shine, without the effort to dig for jewels in the mine of truth. The habits of a poet's mind are not those of industry or research: his images come to him, he does not go to them; and in prose-subjects, and dry matters of fact and close reasoning, the natural stimulus that at other times warms and rouses, deserts him altogether. He sees no unhallowed visions, he is inspired by no daydreams. All is tame, literal, and barren, without the Nine. Nor does he collect his strength to strike fire from the flint by the sharpness of collision, by the eagerness of his blows. He gathers roses, he steals colours from the rainbow. He lives on nectar and ambrosia. He "treads the primrose path of dalliance," or ascends "the highest heaven of invention," or falls flat to the ground. *He is nothing, if not fanciful!*

I shall proceed to explain these remarks, as well as I can, by a few instances in point.

It has always appeared to me that the most perfect prose-style, the most powerful, the most dazzling, the most daring, that which went the nearest to the verge of poetry, and yet never fell over, was Burke's. It has the solidity, and sparkling effect of the diamond: all other *fine writing* is like French paste or Bristol-stones in the comparison. Burke's style is airy, flighty, adventurous, but it never loses sight of the subject; nay, is always in

contact with, and derives its increased or varying impulse from it. It may be said to pass yawning gulfs "on the unstedfast footing of a spear:" still it has an actual resting-place and tangible support under it—it is not suspended on nothing. It differs from poetry, as I conceive, like the chamois from the eagle: it climbs to an almost equal height, touches upon a cloud, overlooks a precipice, is picturesque, sublime—but all the while, instead of soaring through the air, it stands upon a rocky cliff, clambers up by abrupt and intricate ways, and browses on the roughest bark, or crops the tender flower. The principle which guides his pen is truth, not beauty—not pleasure, but power. He has no choice, no selection of subject to flatter the reader's idle taste, or assist his own fancy: he must take what comes, and make the most of it. He works the most striking effects out of the most unpromising materials, by the mere activity of his mind.

- He rises with the lofty, descends with the mean, luxuriates in beauty, gloats over deformity. It is all the same to him, so that he loses no particle of the exact, characteristic, extreme impression of the thing he writes about, and that he communicates this to the reader, after exhausting every possible mode of illustration, plain or abstracted, figurative or literal. Whatever stamps the original image more distinctly on the mind, is welcome. The nature of his task precludes continual beauty; but it does not preclude continual ingenuity, force, originality. He had to treat of political questions, mixed modes, abstract ideas, and his fancy (or poetry, if you will) was ingrafted on these artificially, and as it might sometimes be thought, violently, instead of growing naturally out of them, as it would spring of its own accord from individual objects and feelings. There is a resistance in the *matter* to the illustration applied to it—the concrete and abstract are hardly co-ordinate; and therefore it is that, when the first difficulty is overcome, they must agree more closely in the

essential qualities, in order that the coincidence may be complete. Otherwise, it is good for nothing; and you justly charge the author's style with being loose, vague, flaccid, and imbecile. The poet has been said

To make us heirs
Of truth and pure delight in endless lays.

Not so the prose-writer, who always mingles clay with his gold, and often separates truth from mere pleasure. He can only arrive at the last through the first. In poetry, one pleasing or striking image obviously suggests another: the increasing the sense of beauty or grandeur is the principle of composition: in prose, the professed object is to impart conviction, and nothing can be admitted by way of ornament or relief, that does not add new force or clearness to the original conception. The two classes of ideas brought together by the orator or impassioned prose-writer, to wit, the general subject and the particular image, are so far incompatible, and the identity must be more strict, more marked, more determinate, to make them coalesce to any practical purpose. Every word should be a blow: every thought should instantly grapple with its fellow. There must be a weight, a precision, a conformity from association in the tropes and figures of animated prose to fit them to their place in the argument, and make them *tell*, which may be dispensed with in poetry, where there is something much more congenial between the subject-matter and the illustration—

Like beauty making beautiful old rime!

What can be more remote, for instance, and at the same time more apposite, more *the same*, than the following comparison of the English Constitution to "the proud Keep of Windsor," in the celebrated *Letter to a Noble Lord*?

"Such are *their* ideas; such *their* religion, and such *their* law. But as to *our* country and *our* race, as long as

the well-compacted structure of our Church and State, the sanctuary, the holy of holies of that ancient law, defended by reverence, defended by power—a fortress at once and a temple¹—shall stand inviolate on the brow of the British Sion ; as long as the British Monarchy—not more limited than fenced by the orders of the State—shall, like the proud Keep of Windsor, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of its kindred and coeval towers ; as long as this awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land, so long the mounds and dykes of the low, fat, Bedford level will have nothing to fear from all the pickaxes of all the levellers of France. As long as our Sovereign Lord the King, and his faithful subjects, the Lords and Commons of this realm—the triple cord which no man can break ; the solemn, sworn, constitutional frank-pledge of this nation ; the firm guarantees of each other's being, and each other's rights ; the joint and several securities, each in its place and order, for every kind, and every quality of property and of dignity—As long as these endure, so long the Duke of Bedford is safe : and we are all safe together—the high from the blights of envy and the spoliations of rapacity ; the low from the iron hand of oppression and the insolent spurn of contempt. Amen ! and so be it : and so it will be,

Dum domus Æneæ Capitoli immobile saxum
Accolet ; imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.”

Nothing can well be more impracticable to a simile than the vague and complicated idea which is here embodied in one ; yet how finely, how nobly it stands out, in natural grandeur, in royal state, with double barriers round it to answer for its identity, with “ buttress, frieze, and coigne of 'vantage ” for the imagination to “ make its pendant bed and procreant cradle,” till the idea is confounded with the object representing it—the wonder of a kingdom ; and

¹ “ Templum in modum arcis.”

Tacitus, of the Temple of Jerusalem.

then how striking, how determined the descent, "at one fell swoop," to the "low, fat, Bedford level!" Poetry would have been bound to maintain a certain decorum, a regular balance between these two ideas; sterling prose throws aside all such idle respect to appearances, and with its pen, like a sword, "sharp and sweet," lays open the naked truth! The poet's Muse is like a mistress, whom we keep only while she is young and beautiful, *durante bene placito*; the Muse of prose is like a wife, whom we take during life, *for better for worse*. Burke's execution, like that of all good prose, savours of the texture of what he describes, and his pen slides or drags over the ground of his subject, like the painter's pencil. The most rigid fidelity and the most fanciful extravagance meet, and are reconciled in his pages. I never pass Windsor but I think of this passage in Burke, and hardly know to which I am indebted most for enriching my moral sense, that or the fine picturesque stanza in Gray,

From Windsor's heights the expanse below
Of mead, of lawn, of wood survey, &c.

I might mention that the so-much-admired description in one of the India speeches, of Hyder Ally's army (I think it is) which "now hung like a cloud upon the mountain, and now burst upon the plain like a thunderbolt," would do equally well for poetry or prose. It is a bold and striking illustration of a naturally impressive object. This is not the case with the Abbe Sieyes's far-famed "pigeon-holes," nor with the comparison of the Duke of Bedford to "the Leviathan, tumbling about his unwieldy bulk in the ocean of royal bounty." Nothing here saves the description but the force of the invective; the startling truth, the vehemence, the remoteness, the aptitude, the perfect peculiarity and coincidence of the allusion. No writer would ever have thought of it but himself; no reader can ever forget it. What is there in common, one

might say, between a Peer of the Realm, and "that sea-beast," of those

Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream?

Yet Burke has knit the two ideas together, and no man can put them asunder. No matter how slight and precarious the connection, the length of line it is necessary for the fancy to give out in keeping hold of the object on which it has fastened, he seems to have "put his hook in the nostrils" of this enormous creature of the crown, that empurples all its track through the glittering expanse of a profound and restless imagination!

In looking into the *Iris* of last week, I find the following passages, in an article on the death of Lord Castlereagh.

"The splendour of Majesty leaving the British metropolis, careering along the ocean, and landing in the capital of the North, is distinguished only by glimpses through the dense array of clouds in which Death hid himself, while he struck down to the dust the stateliest courtier near the throne, and the broken train of which pursues and crosses the Royal progress wherever its glories are presented to the eye of imagination.

"The same indefatigable mind—a mind of all work—which thus ruled the Continent with a rod of iron, the sword—within the walls of the House of Commons ruled a more distracted region with a more subtle and finely-tempered weapon, the tongue; and truly, if this *was* the only weapon his Lordship wielded there, where he had daily to encounter, and frequently almost alone, enemies more formidable than Buonaparte, it must be acknowledged that he achieved greater victories than Demosthenes or Cicero ever gained in far more easy fields of strife; nay, he wrought miracles of speech, outvying those miracles of song, which Orpheus is said to have performed, when not only men and brutes, but rocks, woods, and mountains, followed the sound of his voice and lyre. . . .

“But there was a worm at the root of the gourd that flourished over his head in the brightest sunshine of a court; both perished in a night, and in the morning, that which had been his glory and his shadow, covered him like a shroud; while the corpse, notwithstanding all his honours, and titles, and offices, lay unmoved in the place where it fell, till a judgment had been passed upon him, which the poorest peasant escapes when he dies in the ordinary course of nature.”¹

This, it must be confessed, is very unlike Burke: yet Mr. Montgomery is a very pleasing poet, and a strenuous politician. The whole is *travelling out of the record*, and to no sort of purpose. The author is constantly getting away from the impression of his subject, to envelope himself in a cloud of images, which weaken and perplex, instead of adding force and clearness to it. Provided he is figurative, he does not care how commonplace or irrelevant the figures are, and he wanders on, delighted in a labyrinth of words, like a truant schoolboy, who is only glad to have escaped from his task. He has a very slight hold of his subject, and is tempted to let it go for any fallacious ornament of style. How obscure and circuitous is the allusion to “the clouds in which Death hid himself, to strike down the stateliest courtier near the throne!” How hackneyed is the reference to Demosthenes and Cicero, and how utterly quaint and unmeaning is the ringing the changes upon Orpheus and his train of men, beasts, woods, rocks, and mountains in connection with Lord Castlereagh! But he is better pleased with this classical fable than with the death of the Noble Peer, and delights to dwell upon it, to however little use. So he is glad to take advantage of the Scriptural idea of a gourd; not to enforce, but as a relief to his reflections; and points his conclusion with a puling sort of commonplace—that a peasant, who dies a natural death, has no Coroner’s

¹ *Sheffield Advertiser*, Aug. 20, 1822.

Inquest to sit upon him. All these are the faults of the ordinary poetical style. Poets think they are bound by the tenour of their indentures to the Muses, to “elevate and surprise” in every line; and not having the usual resources in common or abstracted subjects, aspire to the end without the means. They make, or pretend, an extraordinary interest where there is none. They are ambitious, vain, and indolent—more busy in preparing idle ornaments, which they take their chance of bringing in somehow or other, than intent on eliciting truths by fair and honest inquiry. It should seem as if they considered prose as a sort of waiting-maid to poetry, that could only be expected to wear her mistress’s cast-off finery. Poets have been said to succeed best in fiction; and the account here given may in part explain the reason. That is to say, they must choose their own subject, in such a manner as to afford them continual opportunities of appealing to the senses and exciting the fancy. Dry details, abstruse speculations do not give scope to vividness of description; and, as they cannot bear to be considered dull, they become too often affected, extravagant, and insipid.

I am indebted to Mr. Coleridge for the comparison of poetic prose to the secondhand finery of a lady’s-maid (just made use of). He himself is an instance of his own observation, and (what is even worse) of the opposite fault—an affectation of quaintness and originality. With bits of tarnished lace and worthless frippery, he assumes a sweeping oriental costume, or borrows the stiff dresses of our ancestors, or starts an eccentric fashion of his own. He is swelling and turgid—everlastingly aiming to be greater than his subject; filling his fancy with fumes and vapours in the pangs and throes of miraculous parturition, and bringing forth only *still births*. He has an incessant craving, as it were, to exalt every idea into a metaphor, to expand every sentiment into a lengthened mystery, voluminous and vast, confused and cloudy. His

style is not succinct, but incumbered with a train of words and images that have no practical, and only a possible relation to one another—that add to its stateliness, but impede its march. One of his sentences winds its “forlorn way obscure” over the page like a patriarchal procession with camels laden, wreathed turbans, household wealth, the whole riches of the author’s mind poured out upon the barren waste of his subject. The palm-tree spreads its sterile branches overhead, and the land of promise is seen in the distance. All this is owing to his wishing to overdo everything—to make something more out of everything than it is, or than it is worth. The simple truth does not satisfy him—no direct proposition fills up the moulds of his understanding. All is foreign, farfetched, irrelevant, laboured, unproductive. To read one of his disquisitions is like hearing the variations to a piece of music without the score. Or, to vary the simile, he is not like a man going a journey by the stage-coach along the highroad, but is always getting into a balloon, and mounting into the air, above the plain ground of prose. Whether he soars to the empyrean, or dives to the centre (as he sometimes does), it is equally to get away from the question before him, and to prove that he owes everything to his own mind. His object is to invent; he scorns to imitate. The business of prose is the contrary. But Mr. Coleridge is a poet, and his thoughts are free.

I think the poet-laureate¹ is a much better prose-writer. His style has an antique quaintness, with a modern familiarity. He has just a sufficient sprinkling of *archaisms*, of allusions to old Fuller,² and Burton,³ and

¹ Southey.—Ed.

² In reference, chiefly, to Fuller’s better-known works, the *Worthies of England*, 1662, and the *Holy and Profane State*.—Ed.

³ Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, first printed in 1621, and much altered in subsequent editions.—Ed.

Latimer,¹ to set off or qualify the smart flippant tone of his apologies for existing abuses, or the ready, galling virulence of his personal invectives. Mr. Southey is a faithful historian, and no inefficient partisan. In the former character his mind is tenacious of facts; and in the latter, his spleen and jealousy prevent the “extravagant and erring spirit” of the poet from losing itself in Fancy’s endless maze. He “stoops to *earth*,” at least, and prostitutes his pen to some purpose (not at the same time losing his own soul, and gaining nothing by it)—and he vilifies Reform, and praises the reign of George III. in good set terms, in a straightforward, intelligible, practical, pointed way. He is not buoyed up by conscious power out of the reach of common apprehensions, but makes the most of the obvious advantages he possesses. You may complain of a pettiness and petulance of manner, but certainly there is no want of spirit or facility of execution. He does not waste powder and shot in the air, but loads his piece, takes a level aim, and hits his mark. One would say (though his Muse is ambidexter) that he wrote prose with his right hand; there is nothing awkward or circuitous, or feeble in it. “The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo:” but this would not apply to him. His prose-lucubrations are pleasanter reading than his poetry. Indeed he is equally practised and voluminous in both; and it is no improbable conjecture, that Mr. Southey may have had some idea of rivalling the reputation of Voltaire in the extent, the spirit, and the versatility of his productions in prose and verse, except that he has written no tragedies but *Wat Tyler*!

To my taste, the Author of *Rimini*, and Editor of the *Examiner*,² is among the best and least corrupted of our poetical prose-writers. In his light but well-supported

¹ Bishop Latimer’s *Seven Sermons Before Edward VI.*, delivered and published in 1549.—Ed.

² Leigh Hunt.—Ed.

columns we find the raciness, the sharpness, and sparkling effect of poetry, with little that is extravagant or far-fetched, and no turgidity or pompous pretension. Perhaps there is too much the appearance of relaxation and trifling (as if he had escaped the shackles of rhyme), a caprice, a levity, and a disposition to innovate in words and ideas. Still the genuine master spirit of the prose-writer is there; the tone of lively sensible conversation; and this may in part arise from the author's being himself an animated talker. Mr. Hunt wants something of the heat and earnestness of the political partisan; but his familiar and miscellaneous papers have all the ease, grace, and point of the best style of Essay-writing. Many of his effusions in the *Indicator* show, that if he had devoted himself exclusively to that mode of writing, he inherits more of the spirit of Steele than any man since his time.

Lord Byron's prose is bad; that is to say, heavy, laboured, and coarse: he tries to knock some one down with the butt-end of every line, which defeats his object—and the style of the Author of *Waverley* (if he comes fairly into this discussion) as mere style is villainous. It is pretty plain he is a poet; for the sound of names runs mechanically in his ears, and he rings the changes unconsciously on the same words in a sentence, like the same rhymes in a couplet.

Not to spin out this discussion too much, I would conclude by observing, that some of the old English prose-writers (who were not poets) are the best, and, at the same time, the most *poetical* in the favourable sense. Among these we may reckon some of the old divines, and Jeremy Taylor at the head of them. There is a flush like the dawn over his writings; the sweetness of the rose, the freshness of the morning dew. There is a softness in his style, proceeding from the tenderness of his heart: but his head is firm, and his hand is free. His materials are as finely wrought up as they are original and attrac-

tive in themselves. Milton's prose-style savours too much of poetry, and, as I have already hinted, of an imitation of the Latin. Dryden's is perfectly unexceptionable, and a model, in simplicity, strength, and perspicuity, for the subjects he treated of.

On Dreams.

DR. SPURZHEIM, in treating of the *Physiology of the Brain*,¹ has the following curious passage :

“ The state of somnambulism equally proves the plurality of the organs. This is the state of incomplete sleep, wherein several organs are watching. It is known that the brain acts upon the external world by means of voluntary motion, of the voice, and of the five external senses. Now, if in sleeping some organs be active, dreams take place ; if the action of the brain be propagated to the muscles, there follow motions ; if the action of the brain be propagated to the vocal organs, the sleeping person speaks. Indeed, it is known that sleeping persons dream and speak ; others dream, speak, hear, and answer ; others still dream, rise, do various things, and walk. This latter state is called somnambulism, that is, the state of walking during sleep. Now, as the ear can hear, so the eyes may see, while the other organs sleep ; and there are facts quite positive which prove that several persons in the state of somnambulism have seen, but always with open eyes. There are also convulsive fits in which the patients see without hearing, and *vice versâ*. Some somnambulists

¹ Dr. Spurzheim published in 1818, 8vo., *Observations sur la Phrenologie*, and in 1820, 8vo., *Essai Philosophique sur la Nature Morale et Intellectuelle*. But the work which suggested the present Essay was, *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, founded on an Anatomical and Physiological Examination of the Nervous System in general, and of the Brain in particular*. 1815, 8vo. But compare Essay XII. of *Second Series*.—ED.

do things of which they are not capable in a state of watching; and dreaming persons reason sometimes better than they do when awake. This phenomenon is not astonishing," &c.¹

There is here a very singular mixing up of the flattest truisms with the most gratuitous assumptions; so that the one being told with great gravity, and the other delivered with the most familiar air, one is puzzled in a cursory perusal to distinguish which is which. This is an art of stultifying the reader, like that of the juggler, who shows you some plain matter-of-fact experiment just as he is going to play off his capital trick. The mind is, by this alternation of style, thrown off its guard; and between wondering first at the absurdity, and then at the superficiality of the work, becomes almost a convert to it. A thing exceedingly questionable is stated so roundly, you think there must be something in it: the plainest proposition is put in so doubtful and cautious a manner, you conceive the writer must see a great deal farther into the subject than you do. You mistrust your ears and eyes, and are in a fair way to resign the use of your understanding. It is a fine style of *mystifying*. Again, it is the practice with the German school, and in particular with Dr. Spurzheim, to run counter to common sense and the best authenticated opinions. They must always be more knowing than everybody else, and treat the wisdom of the ancients, and the wisdom of the moderns, much in the same supercilious way. It has been taken for granted generally that people see with their eyes; and therefore it is stated in the above passage as a discovery of the author, "imparted in dreadful secresy," that sleep-walkers always see with their eyes open. The meaning of which is, that we are not to give too implicit or unqualified an assent to the principle, at which modern philosophers have arrived with some pains and difficulty, that we acquire our ideas

¹ *Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim*, p. 217.

of external objects through the senses. The *transcendental* sophists wish to back out of that, as too conclusive and well-defined a position. They would be glad to throw the whole of what has been done on this question into confusion again, in order to begin *de novo*, like children who construct houses with cards, and when the pack is built up, shuffle them all together on the table again. These intellectual Sysiphuses are always rolling the stone of knowledge up a hill, for the perverse pleasure of rolling it down again. Having gone as far as they can in the direction of reason and good sense, rather than seem passive or the slaves of any opinion, they turn back with a wonderful look of sagacity to all sorts of exploded prejudices and absurdity. It is a pity that we cannot *let well done alone*, and that after labouring for centuries to remove ignorance, we set our faces with the most wilful officiousness against the stability of knowledge. The *Physiognomical System* of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim is full of this sort of disgusting cant. We are still only to *believe in all unbelief*—in what they tell us. The less credulous we are of other things, the more faith we shall have in reserve for them: by exhausting our stock of scepticism and caution on such obvious matters-of-fact as that people always see with their eyes open, we shall be prepared to swallow their crude and extravagant theories whole, and not be astonished at “the phenomenon, that persons sometimes reason better asleep than awake!”

I have alluded to this passage because I myself am (or used some time ago to be) a sleep-walker; and know how the thing is. In this sort of disturbed, unsound sleep, the eyes are not closed, and are attracted by the light. I used to get up and go towards the window, and make violent efforts to throw it open. The air in some measure revived me, or I might have tried to fling myself out. I saw objects indistinctly, the houses, for instance, facing me on the opposite side of the street; but still it

was some time before I could recognise them or recollect where I was : that is, I was still asleep, and the dimness of my senses (as far as it prevailed) was occasioned by the greater numbness of my memory. This phenomenon is not astonishing, unless we choose in all such cases to put the cart before the horse. For in fact, it is the mind that sleeps, and the senses (so to speak) only follow the example. The mind dozes, and the eyelids close in consequence : we do not go to sleep because we shut our eyes. I can, however, speak to the fact of the eyes being open when their sense is shut ; or rather, when we are unable to draw just inferences from it. It is generally in the night-time, indeed, or in a strange place, that the circumstance happens ; but as soon as the light dawns on the recollection, the obscurity and perplexity of the senses clear up. The external impression is made before, much in the same manner as it is after we are awake ; but it does not lead to the usual train of associations connected with that impression ; *e.g.*, the name of the street or town where we are, who lives at the opposite house, how we came to sleep in the room where we are, &c. ; all which are ideas belonging to our waking experience, and are at this time cut off or greatly disturbed by sleep. It is just the same as when persons recover from a swoon, and fix their eyes unconsciously on those about them, for a considerable time before they recollect where they are. Would anyone but a German physiologist think it necessary to assure us that at this time they see, but with their eyes open, or pretend that though they have lost all memory or understanding during their fainting fit, their minds act then more vigorously and freely than ever, because they are not distracted by outward impressions ? The appeal is made to the outward sense, in the instances we have seen ; but the mind is deaf to it, because its functions are for the time gone. It is ridiculous to pretend with this author, that in sleep

some of the organs of the mind rest, while others are active: it might as well be pretended that in sleep one eye watches while the other is shut. The stupor is general: the faculty of thought itself is impaired; and whatever ideas we have, instead of being confined to any particular faculty or the impressions of any one sense, and invigorated thereby, float at random from object to object, from one class of impressions to another, without coherence or control. The *conscious* or connecting link between our ideas, which forms them into separate groups or compares different parts and views of a subject together, seems to be that which is principally wanting in sleep; so that any idea that presents itself in this anarchy of the mind is lord of the ascendant for the moment, and is driven out by the next straggling notion that comes across it. The bundles of thought are, as it were, untied, loosened from a common centre, and drift along the stream of fancy as it happens. Hence the confusion (not the concentration of the faculties) that continually takes place in this state of half-perception. The mind takes in but one thing at a time, but one part of a subject, and therefore cannot correct its sudden and heterogeneous transitions from one momentary impression to another by a larger grasp of understanding. Thus we confound one person with another, merely from some accidental coincidence, the name or the place where we have seen them, or their having been concerned with us in some particular transaction the evening before. They lose and regain their proper identity perhaps half a dozen times in this rambling way; nor are we able (though we are somewhat incredulous and surprised at these compound creations) to detect the error, from not being prepared to trace the same connected subject of thought to a number of varying and successive ramifications, or to form the idea of a *whole*. We think that Mr. Such-a-one did so and so; then, from a second face coming across us, like the slides

of a magic lantern, it was not he, but another ; then some one calls him by his right name, and he is himself again. We are little shocked at these gross contradictions ; for if the mind was capable of perceiving them in all their absurdity, it would not be liable to fall into them. It runs into them for the same reason that it is hardly conscious of them when made.

— That which was now a horse, a bear, a cloud,
Even with a thought the rack dislimns,
And makes it indistinct as water is in water.

The difference, so far then, between sleeping and waking seems to be, that in the latter we have a greater range of conscious recollections, a larger discourse of reason, and associate ideas in longer trains and more as they are connected one with another in the order of nature ; whereas in the former, any two impressions, that meet or are alike, join company, and then are parted again, without notice, like the froth from the wave. So in madness, there is, I should apprehend, the same tyranny of the imagination over the judgment ; that is, the mind has slipped its cable, and single images meet, and jostle, and unite suddenly together, without any power to arrange or compare them with others with which they are connected in the world of reality. There is a continual phantasmagoria : whatever shapes and colours come together are by the heat and violence of the brain referred to external nature, without regard to the order of time, place, or circumstance. From the same want of continuity, we often forget our dreams so speedily : if we cannot catch them as they are passing out at the door, we never set eyes on them again. There is no clue or thread of imagination to trace them by. In a morning sometimes we have had a dream that we try in vain to recollect ; it is gone, like the rainbow from the cloud. At other times (so evanescent is their texture) we forget

that we have dreamt at all; and at these times the mind seems to have been a mere blank, and sleep presents only an image of death. Hence has arisen the famous dispute, *Whether the soul thinks always?*—on which Mr. Locke and different writers have bestowed so much tedious and unprofitable discussion; some maintaining that the mind was like a watch that goes continually, though more slowly and irregularly at one time than another; while the opposite party contended that it often stopped altogether, bringing the example of sound sleep as an argument, and desiring to know what proof we could have of thoughts passing through the mind, of which it was itself perfectly unconscious, and retained not the slightest recollection. I grant, we often sleep so sound, or have such faint imagery passing through the brain, that if we awake by degrees, we forget it altogether: we recollect our first waking, and perhaps some imperfect suggestions of fancy just before; but beyond this, all is mere oblivion. But I have observed that whenever I have been waked up suddenly, and not left to myself to recover from this state of mental torpor, I have been always dreaming of something, i. e., thinking, according to the tenor of the question. Let anyone call you at any time, however fast asleep you may be, you make out their voice in the first surprise to be like some one's you were thinking of in your sleep. Let an accidental noise, the falling of something in the next room, rouse you up, you constantly find something to associate it with, or translate it back into the language of your slumbering thoughts. You are never taken completely at a *nonplus*—summoned, as it were, out of a state of nonexistence. It is easy for anyone to try the experiment upon himself; that is, to examine every time he is waked up suddenly, so that his waking and sleeping state are brought into immediate contact, whether he has not in all such cases been dreaming of something, and not fairly *caught napping*. For

myself, I think I can speak with certainty. It would indeed be rather odd to awake out of such an absolute privation and suspense of thought as is contended for by the partisans of the ~~contrary~~ theory. It would be a peep into the grave, a consciousness of death, an escape from the world of nonentity!

The vividness of our impressions in dreams, of which so much has been said, seems to be rather apparent than real; or, if this mode of expression should be objected to as unwarrantable, rather physical than mental. It is a vapour, a fume, the effect of the "heat-oppressed brain." The imagination gloats over an idea, and doats at the same time. However warm or brilliant the colouring of these changing appearances, they vanish with the dawn. They are put out by our waking thoughts, as the sun puts out a candle. It is unlucky that we sometimes remember the heroic sentiments, the profound discoveries, the witty repartees we have uttered in our sleep. The one turn to bombast, the others are mere truisms, and the last absolute nonsense. Yet we clothe them certainly with a fancied importance at the moment. This seems to be merely the effervescence of the blood or of the brain, physically acting. It is an odd thing in sleep, that we not only fancy we see different persons, and talk to them, but that we hear them make answers, and startle us with an observation or a piece of news; and though we of course put the answer into their mouths, we have no idea beforehand what it will be, and it takes us as much by surprise as it would in reality. This kind of successful ventriloquism which we practise upon ourselves may perhaps be in some measure accounted for from the shortsightedness and incomplete consciousness which were remarked above as the peculiar characteristics of sleep.

The power of prophesying or foreseeing things in our sleep, as from a higher and more abstracted sphere of

thought, need not be here argued upon. There is, however, a sort of profundity in sleep ; and it may be usefully consulted as an oracle in this way. It may be said that the voluntary power is suspended, and things come upon us as unexpected revelations, which we keep out of our thoughts at other times. We may be aware of a danger that yet we do not choose, while we have the full command of our faculties, to acknowledge to ourselves : the impending event will then appear to us as a dream, and we shall most likely find it verified afterwards. Another thing of no small consequence is, that we may sometimes discover our tacit, and almost unconscious sentiments, with respect to persons or things in the same way. We are not hypocrites in our sleep. The curb is taken off from our passions, and our imagination wanders at will. When awake, we check these rising thoughts, and fancy we have them not. In dreams, when we are off our guard, they return securely and unbidden. We may make this use of the infirmity of our sleeping metamorphosis, that we may repress any feelings of this sort that we disapprove in their incipient state, and detect, ere it be too late, an unwarrantable antipathy or fatal passion. Infants cannot disguise their thoughts from others ; and in sleep we reveal the secret to ourselves.

It should appear that I have never been in love, for the same reason. I never dream of the face of anyone I am particularly attached to. I have thought almost to agony of the same person for years, nearly without ceasing, so as to have her face always before me, and to be haunted by a perpetual consciousness of disappointed passion, and yet I never in all that time dreamt of this person more than once or twice, and then not vividly. I conceive, therefore, that this perseverance of the imagination in a fruitless track must have been owing to mortified pride, to an intense desire and hope of good in the abstract, more than to love, which I consider as an individual and

involuntary passion, and which therefore, when it is strong, must predominate over the fancy in sleep. I think myself into love, and dream myself out of it. I should have made a very bad Endymion, in this sense; for all the time the heavenly Goddess was shining over my head, I should never have had a thought about her. If I had waked and found her gone, I might have been in a considerable *taking*. Coleridge used to laugh at me for my want of the faculty of dreaming; and once, on my saying that I did not like the preternatural stories in the *Arabian Nights* (for the comic parts I love dearly), he said, "That must be because you never dream. There is a class of poetry built on this foundation, which is surely no inconsiderable part of our nature, since we are asleep and building up imaginations of this sort half our time." I had nothing to say against it: it was one of his conjectural subtleties, in which he excels all the persons I ever knew; but I had some satisfaction in finding afterwards that I had Bishop Atterbury expressly on my side in this question, who has recorded his detestation of *Sinbad the Sailor*, in an interesting letter to Pope. Perhaps he, too, did not dream!

Yet I dream sometimes; I dream of the Louvre—*Intus et in cute*. I dreamt I was there a few weeks ago, and that the old scene returned—that I looked for my favourite pictures, and found them gone or erased. The dream of my youth came upon me; a glory and a vision unutterable, that comes no more but in darkness and in sleep: my heart rose up, and I fell on my knees, and lifted up my voice and wept, and I awoke. I also dreamt a little while ago, that I was reading the *New Eloise* to an old friend, and came to the concluding passage in Julia's farewell letter, which had much the same effect upon me. The words are, "*Trop heureuse d'acheter au prix de ma vie le droit de t'aimer toujours sans crime et de te le dire encore une fois, avant que je meurs !*" I used to sob over

this passage twenty years ago; and in this dream about it lately, I seemed to live these twenty years over again in one short moment! I do not dream ordinarily; and there are people who never could see anything in the *New Eloise*. Are we not quits!

On the Conversation of Authors.

AN author is bound to write—well or ill, wisely or foolishly: it is his trade. But I do not see that he is bound to talk, any more than he is bound to dance, or ride, or fence better than other people. Reading, study, silence, thought, are a bad introduction to loquacity. It would be sooner learnt of chambermaids and tapsters. He understands the art and mystery of his own profession, which is bookmaking: what right has anyone to expect or require him to do more—to make a bow gracefully on entering or leaving a room, to make love charmingly, or to make a fortune at all? In all things there is a division of labour. A lord is no less amorous for writing ridiculous love-letters, nor a general less successful for wanting wit and honesty. Why, then, may not a poor author say nothing, and yet pass muster? Set him on the top of a stage-coach, he will make no figure; he is *mum-chance*, while the slang-wit flies about as fast as the dust, with the crack of the whip and the clatter of the horses' heels: put him in a ring of boxers, he is a poor creature—

And of his port as meek as is a maid.

Introduce him to a tea-party of milliners' girls, and they are ready to split their sides with laughing at him: over his bottle, he is dry: in the drawing-room, rude or awkward: he is too refined for the vulgar, too clownish for the fashionable:—"he is one that cannot make a good

leg, one that cannot eat a mess of broth cleanly, one that cannot ride a horse without spur-galling, one that cannot salute a woman, and look on her directly :”—in courts, in camps, in town and country, he is a cypher or a butt : he is good for nothing but a laughing-stock or a scarecrow. You can scarcely get a word out of him for love or money. He knows nothing. He has no notion of pleasure or business, or of what is going on in the world ; he does not understand cookery (unless he is a doctor in divinity), nor surgery, nor chemistry (unless he is a *quidnunc*), nor mechanics, nor husbandry and tillage (unless he is as great an admirer of Tull’s *Husbandry*, and has profited as much by it as the philosopher of Botley)—no, nor music, painting, the drama, nor the fine arts in general.

“What the deuce is it then, my good sir, that he does understand, or know anything about ?”

“BOOKS, VENUS, BOOKS !”

“What books ?”

“Not receipt-books, Madona, nor account-books, nor books of pharmacy, or the veterinary art (they belong to their respective callings and handicrafts), but books of liberal taste and general knowledge.”

“What do you mean by that general knowledge which implies not a knowledge of things in general, but an ignorance (by your own account) of every one in particular : or by that liberal taste which scorns the pursuits and acquirements of the rest of the world in succession, and is confined exclusively, and by way of excellence, to what nobody takes an interest in but yourself, and a few idlers like yourself ? Is this what the critics mean by the *belles-lettres*, and the study of humanity ?”

Book-knowledge, in a word, then, is knowledge *communicable by books* : and it is general and liberal for this reason, that it is intelligible and interesting on the bare suggestion. That to which anyone feels a romantic attachment, merely from finding it in a book, must be

interesting in itself: that which he constantly forms a lively and entire conception of, from seeing a few marks and scratches upon paper, must be taken from common nature: that which, the first time you meet with it, seizes upon the attention as a curious speculation, must exercise the general faculties of the human mind. There are certain broader aspects of society and views of things common to every subject, and more or less cognisable to every mind; and these the scholar treats, and founds his claims to general attention upon them, without being chargeable with pedantry. The minute descriptions of fishing-tackle, of baits and flies in *Walton's Complete Angler*, make that work a great favourite with sportsmen: the alloy of an amiable humanity, and the modest but touching descriptions of familiar incidents and rural objects scattered through it, have made it an equal favourite with every reader of taste and feeling. *Montaigne's Essays*, *Dilworth's Spelling Book*, and *Fearn's Treatise on Contingent Remainders*, are all equally books, but not equally adapted for all classes of readers. The two last are of no use but to schoolmasters and lawyers: but the first is a work we may recommend to anyone to read who has ever thought at all, or who would learn to think justly on any subject. Persons of different trades and professions—the mechanic, the shopkeeper, the medical practitioner, the artist, &c., may all have great knowledge and ingenuity in their several vocations, the details of which will be very edifying to themselves, and just as incomprehensible to their neighbours: but over and above this professional and technical knowledge, they must be supposed to have a stock of common sense and common feeling to furnish subjects for common conversation, or to give them any pleasure in each other's company. It is to this common stock of ideas, spread over the surface, or striking its roots into the very centre of society, that the popular writer appeals, and not in vain; for he finds readers. It is of

this finer essence of wisdom and humanity "ethereal mould, sky-tinctured," that books of the better sort are made. They contain the language of thought. It must happen that, in the course of time and the variety of human capacity, some persons will have struck out finer observations, reflections, and sentiments than others. These they have committed to books of memory, have bequeathed as a lasting legacy to posterity; and such persons have become standard authors. We visit at the shrine, drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily "breathe in other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits." Are we to be blamed for this because the vulgar and illiterate do not always understand us? The fault is rather in them who are "confined and cabin'd in" each in their own particular sphere and compartment of ideas, and have not the same refined medium of communication or abstracted topics of discourse. Bring a number of literary, or of illiterate persons together, perfect strangers to each other, and see which party will make the best company. "Verily, we have our reward." We have made our election, and have no reason to repent it, if we were wise. But the misfortune is, we wish to have all the advantages on one side. We grudge, and cannot reconcile it to ourselves, that anyone "should go about to cozen fortune, without the stamp of learning!" We think "because we are *scholars*, there shall be no more cakes and ale!" We don't know how to account for it, that barmaids should gossip, or ladies whisper, or bullies roar, or fools laugh, or knaves thrive, without having gone through the same course of select study that we have! This vanity is preposterous, and carries its own punishment with it. Books are a world in themselves, it is true; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it. Learning is a sacred deposit from the experience of ages; but it has not put all future experience on the shelf, or

debarred the common herd of mankind from the use of their hands, tongues, eyes, ears, or understandings. Taste is a luxury for the privileged few: but it would be hard upon those who have not the same standard of refinement in their own minds that we suppose ourselves to have, if this should prevent them from having recourse, as usual, to their old frolics, coarse jokes, and horse-play, and getting through the wear and tear of the world, with such homely sayings and shrewd helps as they may. Happy is it, that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles; and moving on the same, in spite of our fine-spun distinctions, fantastic theories, and lines of demarcation, which are like chalk-figures drawn on ball-room floors to be danced out before morning! In the field opposite the window where I write this, there is a country-girl picking stones: in the one next it, there are several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn: farther on, are two boys, tending a flock of sheep. What do they know or care about what I am writing about them, or ever will?—or what would they be the better for it, if they did? Or why need we despise

The wretched slave,
Who like a lackey, from the rise to the set,
Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium; next day, after dawn,
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse;
And follows so the ever-running year
With profitable labour to his grave?

Is not this life as sweet as writing *Ephemerides*? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment, and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists everywhere, and lasts always. We not only underrate the force of nature, and make too much of art—but we also overrate our own accomplishments and

advantages derived from art. In the presence of clownish ignorance, or of persons without any great pretensions, real or affected, we are very much inclined to take upon ourselves, as the virtual representatives of science, art, and literature. We have a strong itch to show off and do the honours of civilization for all the great men whose works we have ever read, and whose names our auditors have never heard of, as noblemen's lacqueys, in the absence of their masters, give themselves airs of superiority over everyone else. But though we have read Congreve, a stage-coachman may be an over-match for us in wit: though we are deep-versed in the excellence of Shakspeare's colloquial style, a village beldam may outscold us: though we have read Machiavel in the original Italian, we may be easily outwitted by a clown: and though we have cried our eyes out over the *New Eloise*, a poor shepherd-lad, who hardly knows how to spell his own name, may "tell his tale, under the hawthorn in the dale," and prove a more thriving wooer. What then is the advantage we possess over the meanest of the mean? Why this, that we have read Congreve, Shakspeare, Machiavel, the *New Eloise*;—not that we are to have their wit, genius, shrewdness, or melting tenderness.

From speculative pursuits we must be satisfied with speculative benefits. From reading too, we learn to write. If we have had the pleasure of studying the highest models of perfection in their kind, and can hope to leave anything ourselves, however slight, to be looked upon as a model, or even a good copy in its way, we may think ourselves pretty well off, without engrossing all the privileges of learning, and all the blessings of ignorance into the bargain.

It has been made a question whether there have not been individuals in common life of greater talents and powers of mind than the most celebrated writers—whether, for instance, such or such a Liverpool merchant, or Man-

chester manufacturer, was not a more sensible man than Montaigne, of a longer reach of understanding than the Viscount of St. Albans. There is no saying, unless some of these illustrious obscure had communicated their important discoveries to the world. But then they would have been authors! On the other hand, there is a set of critics who fall into the contrary error; and suppose that unless the proof of capacity is laid before all the world, the capacity itself cannot exist; looking upon all those who have not commenced authors, as literally “stocks and stones, and worse than senseless things.” I remember trying to convince a person of this class, that a young lady, whom he knew nothing of, the niece of a celebrated authoress,¹ had just the same sort of fine *tact* and ironical turn in conversation, that her relative had shown in her writings when young. The only answer I could get was an incredulous smile, and the observation that when she wrote anything as good as *Evelina*, or *Cecilia*, he might think her as clever. I said all I meant was, that she had the same family talents, and asked whether he thought that if Miss Burney had not been very clever, as a mere girl, before she wrote her novels, she would ever have written them? It was all in vain. He still stuck to his text, and was convinced that the niece was a little fool compared to her aunt at the same age; and if he had known the aunt formerly, he would have had just the same opinion of *her*. My friend was one of those who have a settled persuasion that it is the book that makes the author, and not the author the book. That’s a strange opinion for a great philosopher to hold. But he wilfully shuts his eyes to the germs and indistinct workings of genius, and treats them with supercilious indifference, till they stare him in the face through the press; and then takes cognisance only of the overt acts and published evidence. This is neither a proof of wisdom, nor the way

¹ Miss Burney.—ED.

to be wise. It is partly pedantry and prejudice, and partly feebleness of judgment and want of magnanimity. He dare as little commit himself on the character of books, as of individuals, till they are stamped by the public. If you show him any work for his approbation, he asks, "Whose is the superscription?"—He judges of genius by its shadow, reputation—of the metal by the coin. He is just the reverse of another person whom I know—for, as Godwin never allows a particle of merit to anyone till it is acknowledged by the whole world, Coleridge withholds his tribute of applause from every person in whom any mortal but himself can descry the least glimpse of understanding. He would be thought to look farther into a millstone than anybody else. He would have others see with his eyes, and take their opinions from him on trust; in spite of their senses. The more obscure and defective the indications of merit, the greater his sagacity and candour in being the first to point them out. He looks upon what he nicknames *a man of genius*, but as the breath of his nostrils, and the clay in the potter's hands. If any such inert, unconscious mass, under the fostering care of the modern Prometheus, is kindled into life,—begins to see, speak, and move, so as to attract the notice of other people,—our jealous patroniser of latent worth in that case throws aside, scorns, and hates his own handiwork; and deserts his intellectual offspring from the moment they can go alone and shift for themselves.—But to pass on to our more immediate subject.

The conversation of authors is not so good as might be imagined: but, such as it is (and with rare exceptions) it is better than any other. The proof of which is, that, when you are used to it, you cannot put up with any other. That of mixed company becomes utterly intolerable—you cannot sit out a common tea and card party, at least, if they pretend to talk at all. You are obliged in despair to cut all your old acquaintances who are not *au fait* on

the prevailing and most smartly contested topics, who are not imbued with the high gusto of criticism and *virtù*. You cannot bear to hear a friend whom you have not seen for many years, tell at how much a yard he sells his laces and tapes, when he means to move into his next house, when he heard last from his relations in the country, whether trade is alive or dead, or whether Mr. Such-a-one gets to look old. This sort of neighbourly gossip will not go down after the high-raised tone of literary conversation. The last may be absurd, very unsatisfactory, and full of turbulence and heartburnings; but it has a zest in it which more ordinary topics of news or family affairs do not supply.

Neither will the conversation of what we understand by *gentlemen* and men of fashion, do after that of men of letters. It is flat, insipid, stale, and unprofitable, in the comparison. They talk about much the same things—pictures, poetry, politics, plays; but they do it worse, and at a sort of vapid secondhand. They, in fact, talk out of newspapers and magazines, what *we write there*. They do not feel the same interest in the subjects they affect to handle with an air of fashionable condescension, nor have they the same knowledge of them, if they were ever so much in earnest in displaying it. If it were not for the wine and the dessert, no author in his senses would accept an invitation to a well-dressed dinner-party, except out of pure good-nature and unwillingness to disoblige by his refusal. Persons in high life talk almost entirely by rote. There are certain established modes of address, and certain answers to them expected as a matter of course, as a point of etiquette. The studied forms of politeness do not give the greatest possible scope to an exuberance of wit and fancy. The fear of giving offence destroys sincerity, and without sincerity there can be no true enjoyment of society, nor unfettered exertion of intellectual activity. Those who have been accustomed to live with the great

are hardly considered as conversable persons in literary society. They are not to be talked with, any more than puppets or echoes. They have no opinions but what will please ; and you naturally turn away, as a waste of time and words, from attending to a person who just before assented to what you said, and whom you find the moment after, from something that unexpectedly or perhaps by design drops from him, to be of a totally different way of thinking. This *bush-fighting* is not regarded as fair play among scientific men.

As fashionable conversation is a sacrifice to politeness, so the conversation of low life is nothing but rudeness. They contradict you without giving a reason, or if they do, it is a very bad one—swear, talk loud, repeat the same thing fifty times over, get to calling names, and from words proceed to blows. You cannot make companions of servants, or persons in an inferior station in life. You may talk to them on matters of business, and what they have to do for you (as lords talk to bruisers on subjects of *fancy*, or country squires to their grooms on horse-racing), but out of that narrow sphere, to any general topic, you cannot lead them ; the conversation soon flags, and you go back to the old question, or are obliged to break up the sitting for want of ideas in common.

The conversation of authors is better than that of most professions. It is better than that of lawyers, who talk nothing but *double entendre*—than that of physicians, who talk of the approaching deaths of the College, or the marriage of some new practitioner with some rich widow—than that of divines, who talk of the last place they dined at—than that of University-men, who make stale puns, repeat the refuse of London newspapers, and affect an ignorance of Greek and mathematics ; it is better than that of players, who talk of nothing but the green-room, and rehearse the scholar, the wit, or the fine gentleman, like a part on the stage ; or than that of ladies, who, what-

ever you talk of, think of nothing, and expect you to think of nothing, but themselves. It is not easy to keep up a conversation with women in company. It is thought a piece of rudeness to differ from them: it is not quite fair to ask them a reason for what they say. You are afraid of pressing too hard upon them: but where you cannot differ openly and unreservedly, you cannot heartily agree. It is not so in France. There the women talk of things in general, and reason better than the men in this country. They are mistresses of the intellectual foils. They are adepts in all the topics. They know what is to be said for and against all sorts of questions, and are lively and full of mischief into the bargain. They are very subtle. They put you to your trumps immediately. Your logic is more in requisition even than your gallantry. You must argue as well as bow yourself into the good graces of these modern amazons. What a situation for an Englishman to be placed in! ¹

The fault of literary conversation in general is its too great tenaciousness. It fastens upon a subject, and will not let it go. It resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure. Perhaps it does this from necessity, from a consciousness of wanting the more familiar graces, the power to sport and trifle, to touch lightly and adorn agreeably, every view or turn of a question *en passant*, as it arises. Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please. "To excel in conversation," said an ingenious man, "one must not be always striving to say good things: to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more indifferent

¹ The topics of metaphysical argument having got into female society in France, is a proof how much they must have been discussed there generally, and how unfounded the charge is which we bring against them of excessive thoughtlessness and frivolity. The French (taken all together) are a more sensible, reflecting, and better informed people than the English. [1825.]

ones." This desire to shine without the means at hand, often makes men silent:—

The fear of being silent strikes us dumb.

A writer who has been accustomed to take a connected view of a difficult question and to work it out gradually in all its bearings, may be very deficient in that quickness and ease which men of the world, who are in the habit of hearing a variety of opinions, who pick up an observation on one subject, and another on another, and who care about none any farther than the passing away of an idle hour, usually acquire. An author has studied a particular point—he has read, he has inquired, he has thought a great deal upon it: he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others, to throw out a hint, to propose an objection: he will either remain silent, uneasy, and dissatisfied, or he will begin at the beginning, and go through with it to the end. He is for taking the whole responsibility upon himself. He would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or indeed would show that nobody else knows anything about it. There are always three or four points on which the literary novice at his first outset in life fancies he can enlighten every company, and bear down all opposition: but he is cured of this quixotic and pugnacious spirit, as he goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions and other pretensions to be adjusted besides his own. When this asperity wears off, and a certain scholastic precocity is mellowed down, the conversation of men of letters becomes both interesting and instructive. Men of the world have no fixed principles, no groundwork of thought: mere scholars have too much an object, a theory always in view, to which they wrest everything, and not unfrequently, common sense itself. By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner, and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater

depth and coherence of understanding. There is more to be learnt from them than from their books. This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse, they are more at liberty to say what they think, to put the subject in different and opposite points of view, to illustrate it more briefly and pithily by familiar expressions, by an appeal to individual character and personal knowledge—to bring in the limitation, to obviate misconception, to state difficulties on their own side of the argument, and answer them as well as they can. This would hardly agree with the prudery, and somewhat ostentatious claims of authorship. Dr. Johnson's conversation in Boswell's *Life* is much better than his published works: and the fragments of the opinions of celebrated men, preserved in their letters or in anecdotes of them, are justly sought after as invaluable for the same reason. For instance, what a fund of sense there is in Grimm's *Memoirs*! We thus get at the essence of what is contained in their more laboured productions, without the affectation or formality. Argument, again, is the death of conversation, if carried on in a spirit of hostility: but discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality: in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth. This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before—"We had a good talk, sir!" As a general rule, there is no conversation worth anything but between friends, or those who agree in the same leading views of a subject. Nothing was ever learnt by either side in a dispute. You contradict one another, will not allow a grain of

sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself, dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages, insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument, and get more and more absurd, dogmatical, and violent every moment. Disputes for victory generally end to the dissatisfaction of all parties; and the one recorded in *Gil Blas* breaks up just as it ought. I once knew a very ingenious man, than whom, to take him in the way of common chit-chat or fire-side gossip, no one could be more entertaining or rational. He would make an apt classical quotation, propose an explanation of a curious passage in Shakspeare's *Venus and Adonis*, detect a metaphysical error in Locke, would infer the volatility of the French character from the chapter in Sterne where the Count mistakes the feigned name of Yorick for a proof of his being the identical imaginary character in Hamlet (*Et vous êtes Yorick !*)—thus confounding words with things twice over—but let a difference of opinion be once hitched in, and it was all over with him. His only object from that time was to shut out common sense, and to be proof against conviction. He would argue the most ridiculous point (such as that there were two original languages) for hours together, nay, through the horologe. You would not suppose it was the same person. He was like an obstinate runaway horse, that takes the bit in his mouth, and becomes mischievous and unmanageable. He had made up his mind to one thing—not to admit a single particle of what anyone else said for or against him. It was all the difference between a man drunk and sober, sane or mad. It is the same when he once gets the pen in his hand. He has been trying to prove a contradiction in terms for the last ten years of his life, viz., that the Bourbons have the same right to the throne of France that the Brunswick family have to the throne of England. Many people think there is a want of

honesty or a want of understanding in this. There is neither. But he will persist in an argument to the last pinch; he will yield, in absurdity, to no man!

This litigious humour is bad enough: but there is one character still worse—that of a person who goes into company, not to contradict, but to *talk at* you. This is the greatest nuisance in civilised society. Such a person does not come armed to defend himself at all points, but to unsettle, if he can, and throw a slur on all your favourite opinions. If he has a notion that anyone in the room is fond of poetry, he immediately volunteers a contemptuous tirade against the idle jingle of verse. If he suspects you have a delight in pictures, he endeavours, not by fair argument, but by a side-wind, to put you out of conceit with so frivolous an art. If you have a taste for music, he does not think much good is to be done by this tickling of the ears. If you speak in praise of a comedy, he does not see the use of wit: if you say you have been to a tragedy, he shakes his head at this mockery of human misery, and thinks it ought to be prohibited. He tries to find out beforehand whatever it is that you take a particular pride or pleasure in, that he may annoy your self-love in the tenderest point (as if he were probing a wound) and make you dissatisfied with yourself and your pursuits for several days afterwards. A person might as well make a practice of throwing out scandalous aspersions against your dearest friends or nearest relations, by way of ingratiating himself into your favour. Such ill-timed impertinence is “villainous, and shows a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.”

The soul of conversation is sympathy.—Authors should converse chiefly with authors, and their talk should be of books. “When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war.” There is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic. No man can get above his pursuit in life: it is getting above himself, which is impossible.

There is a freemasonry in all things. You can only speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret. Hence an argument has been drawn to supersede the necessity of conversation altogether; for it has been said, that there is no use in talking to people of sense, who know all that you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed. There is, however, the smallest encouragement to proceed, when you are conscious that the more you really enter into a subject, the farther you will be from the comprehension of your hearers—and that the more proofs you give of any position, the more odd and out-of-the-way they will think your notions. Coleridge is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says—and *he* talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out. I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences, if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech! In general, wit shines only by reflection. You must take your cue from your company—must rise as they rise, and sink as they fall. You must see that your good things, your knowing allusions, are not flung away, like the pearls in the adage. What a check it is to be asked a foolish question; to find that the first principles are not understood! You are thrown on your back immediately, the conversation is stopped like a country-dance by those who do not know the figure. But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly.

The Same Subject continued.

THIS was the case formerly at Lamb's—where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them.¹ Oh! for the pen of John Bunce to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory!—There was Lamb himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hair-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! “And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered.” Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakspeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author

¹ Thomas Britton. He was a native of Wellingborough, county Northampton. See a good account of him in *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, 1857, p. 339.—ED.

of the *Rambler* was only tolerated in Boswell's *Life* of him; and it was as much as anyone could do to edge in a word for *Junius*. Lamb could not bear *Gil Blas*. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we blackballed most of his list!¹ But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious*! He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in *Paradise Regained* was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for Coleridge to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sour sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation. I cannot say that the party at Lamb's were all of one description. There were honorary members, lay-brothers. Wit and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, "Has he written anything?"—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand,

¹ This subject is treated more at large in the *Essay On Persons one would wish to have seen*, in the volume entitled *Winterslow, &c.*, 1850, p. 35. See *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 1867, cap. 18.—ED.

by analogy, the pungency of other things besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark "two for his Nob" at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned Phillips, and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was —, who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *fiat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy: there was Captain Burney, who had you at an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the Author of *Falstaff's Letters*, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, "turning like the latter end of a lover's lute:"—there was Ayrton, who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. Reynolds, who being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, Phillips cried out, "That's game," and Martin Burney muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side table. Once, and once only, the literary interest overcame the general. For Coleridge was riding the high German horse, and demonstrating the Categories of the Transcendental Philosophy to the Author of the *Road to Ruin*; who insisted on his knowledge of German, and German metaphysics, having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original. "My dear Mr. Holcroft," said Coleridge, in a tone of infinitely provoking conciliation, "you really put me in mind of a sweet pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany—and who one day, as I

was reading the *Limits of the Knowable and the Unknowable*, the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and leaning over, said, ‘What, *you* read Kant? Why, *I* that am a German born, don’t understand him!’” This was too much to bear, and Holcroft, starting up, called out in no measured tone, “Mr. Coleridge, you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most troublesome with your eloquence!” Phillips held the cribbage-peg that was to mark him game, suspended in his hand; and the whist table was silent for a moment. I saw Holcroft downstairs, and, on coming to the landing-place at Mitre Court, he stopped me to observe, that “he thought Mr. Coleridge a very clever man, with a great command of language, but that he feared he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used.” After he was gone, we had our laugh out, and went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the Imagination, and the Will. I wish I could find a publisher for it: it would make a supplement to the *Biographia Literaria* in a volume-and-a-half octavo.

Those days are over! An event, the name of which I wish never to mention, broke up our party, like a bomb-shell thrown into the room: and now we seldom meet——

Like angels’ visits, short and far between.

There is no longer the same set of persons, nor of associations. Lamb does not live where he did. By shifting his abode, his notions seem less fixed. He does not wear his old snuff-coloured coat and breeches. It looks like an alteration in his style. An author and a wit should have a separate costume, a particular cloth: he should present something positive and singular to the mind, like Mr. Douce of the Museum. Our faith in the religion of letters will not bear to be taken to pieces, and put together again by caprice or accident. Leigh Hunt goes there sometimes. He has a fine vinous spirit about him, and tropical blood

in his veins : but he is better at his own table. He has a great flow of pleasantry and delightful animal spirits : but his hits do not tell like Lamb's ; you cannot repeat them the next day. He requires not only to be appreciated but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home. He sits at the head of a party with great gaiety and grace ; has an elegant manner and turn of features ; is never at a loss—*aliquando sufflaminandus erat*—has continual sportive sallies of wit or fancy ; tells a story capitally ; mimics an actor or an acquaintance to admiration ; laughs with great glee and good humour at his own or other people's jokes ; understands the point of an equivoque, or an observation immediately ; has a taste and knowledge of books, of music, of medals ; manages an argument adroitly ; is genteel and gallant, and has a set of bye-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh :—if he has a fault, it is that he does not listen so well as he speaks, is impatient of interruption, and is fond of being looked up to, without considering by whom. I believe, however, he has pretty well seen the folly of this. Neither is his ready display of personal accomplishment and variety of resources an advantage to his writings. They sometimes present a desultory and slipshod appearance, owing to this very circumstance. The same things that tell, perhaps, best to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure of his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner, may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had set it off to advantage. A writer should recollect that he has only to trust to the immediate impression of words, like a musician who sings without the accompaniment of an instrument. There is nothing to help out, or slubber over, the defects of the voice in the one case, nor of the style in

the other. The reader may, if he pleases, get a very good idea of Leigh Hunt's conversation from a very agreeable paper he has lately published, called the *Indicator*, than which nothing can be more happily conceived or executed.

The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard. Authors in general are not good listeners. Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company; and some who are very indifferent, but very great talkers, are as bad. It is sometimes wonderful to see how a person, who has been entertaining or tiring a company by the hour together, drops his countenance as if he had been shot, or had been seized with a sudden lockjaw, the moment anyone interposes a single observation. The best converser I know is, however, the best listener. I mean Mr. Northcote, the painter. Painters by their profession are not bound to shine in conversation, and they shine the more. He lends his ear to an observation as if you had brought him a piece of news, and enters into it with as much avidity and earnestness as if it interested himself personally. If he repeats an old remark or story, it is with the same freshness and point as for the first time. It always arises out of the occasion, and has the stamp of originality. There is no parroting of himself. His look is a continual, ever-varying history-piece of what passes in his mind. His face is a book. There need no marks of interjection or interrogation to what he says. His manner is quite picturesque. There is an excess of character and *naïveté* that never tires. His thoughts bubble up and sparkle like beads on old wine. The fund of anecdote, the collection of curious particulars, is enough to set up any common retailer of jests that dines out every day; but these are not strung together like a row of galley-slaves, but are always introduced to illustrate some argument or bring out some fine distinction of character. The mixture of spleen adds to the sharpness of the point, like poisoned arrows. Mr. North-

cote enlarges with enthusiasm on the old painters, and tells good things of the new. The only thing he ever vexed me in was his liking the *Catalogue Raisonné*. I had almost as soon hear him talk of Titian's pictures (which he does with tears in his eyes, and looking just like them) as see the originals, and I had rather hear him talk of Sir Joshua's than see them. He is the last of that school who knew Goldsmith and Johnson. How finely he describes Pope! His elegance of mind, his figure, his character were not unlike his own. He does not resemble a modern Englishman, but puts one in mind of a Roman cardinal or a Spanish inquisitor. I never ate or drank with Mr. Northcote; but I have lived on his conversation with undiminished relish ever since I can remember,—and when I leave it, I come out into the street with feelings lighter and more ethereal than I have at any other time. One of his *tête-à-têtes* would at any time make an Essay; but he cannot write himself, because he loses himself, in the connecting passages, is fearful of the effect, and wants the habit of bringing his ideas into one focus or view. A *lens* is necessary to collect the diverging rays, the refracted and broken angular lights of conversation on paper. Contradiction is half the battle in talking—the being startled by what others say, and having to answer on the spot. You have to defend yourself, paragraph by paragraph, parenthesis within parenthesis. Perhaps it might be supposed that a person who excels in conversation and cannot write, would succeed better in dialogue. But the stimulus, the immediate irritation would be wanting; and the work would read flatter than ever, from not having the very thing it pretended to have.

Lively sallies and connected discourse are very different things. There are many persons of that impatient and restless turn of mind, that they cannot wait a moment for a conclusion, or follow up the thread of any argument.

In the hurry of conversation their ideas are somehow huddled into sense; but in the intervals of thought, leave a great gap between. Montesquieu said, he often lost an idea before he could find words for it: yet he dictated, by way of saving time, to an amanuensis. This last is, in my opinion, a vile method, and a solecism in authorship. Horne Tooke, among other paradoxes, used to maintain, that no one could write a good style who was not in the habit of talking and hearing the sound of his own voice. He might as well have said that no one could relish a good style without reading it aloud, as we find common people do to assist their apprehension. But there is a method of trying periods on the ear, or weighing them with the scales of the breath, without any articulate sound. Authors, as they write, may be said to "hear a sound so fine, there's nothing lives 'twixt it and silence." Even musicians generally compose in their heads. I agree that no style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect. This holds true not only of emphasis and cadence, but also with regard to natural idiom and colloquial freedom. Sterne's was in this respect the best style that ever was written. You fancy that you hear the people talking. For a contrary reason, no college-man writes a good style, or understands it when written. Fine writing is with him all verbiage and monotony—a translation into classical centos or hexameter-lines.

That which I have just mentioned is among many instances I could give of ingenious absurdities advanced by Mr. Tooke in the heat and pride of controversy. A person who knew him well, and greatly admired his talents, said of him that he never (to his recollection) heard him defend an opinion which he thought right, or in which he believed him to be himself sincere. He indeed provoked his antagonists into the toils by the very extravagance of his assertions, and the teasing sophistry

by which he rendered them plausible. His temper was prompter to his skill. He had the manners of a man of the world, with great scholastic resources. He flung everyone else off his guard, and was himself immovable. I never knew anyone who did not admit his superiority in this kind of warfare. He put a full-stop to one of Coleridge's long-winded prefatory apologies for his youth and inexperience, by saying abruptly, "Speak up, young man!" and, at another time, silenced a learned professor by desiring an explanation of a word which the other frequently used, and which, he said, he had been many years trying to get at the meaning of,—the copulative *Is*! He was the best intellectual fencer of his day. He made strange havoc of Fuseli's fantastic hieroglyphics, violent humours, and oddity of dialect. Curran, who was sometimes of the same party, was lively and animated in convivial conversation, but dull in argument; nay, averse to anything like reasoning or serious observation, and had the worst taste I ever knew. His favourite critical topics were to abuse Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, he confessed a want of sufficient acquaintance with books when he found himself in literary society in London. He and Sheridan once dined at John Kemble's with Mrs. Inchbald and Mary Woolstonecroft, when the discourse almost wholly turned on Love "from noon to dewy eve, a summer's day!" What a subject! What speakers, and what hearers! What would I not give to have been there, had I not learned it all from the bright eyes of Amaryllis, and may one day make a *Table-talk* of it! Peter Pindar was rich in anecdote and grotesque humour, and profound in technical knowledge both of music, poetry, and painting, but he was gross and overbearing. Wordsworth sometimes talks like a man inspired on subjects of poetry (his own out of the question)—Coleridge well on every subject, and Godwin on none. To finish this subject—Mrs. Montagu's conversation is as fine-cut

as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. Hunt's is like champagne, and Northcote's like anchovy sandwiches. Haydon's is like a game at trap-ball: Lamb's like snap-dragon: and my own (if I do not mistake the matter) is not very much unlike a game at ninepins! One source of the conversation of authors is the character of other authors, and on that they are rich indeed. What things they say! What stories they tell of one another, more particularly of their friends! If I durst only give some of these confidential communications! The reader may perhaps think the foregoing a specimen of them—but indeed he is mistaken.

I do not know of any greater impertinence than for an obscure individual to set about pumping a character of celebrity. "Bring him to me," said a Doctor Tronchin, speaking of Rousseau, "that I may see whether he has anything in him." Before you can take measure of the capacity of others, you ought to be sure that they have not taken measure of yours. They may think you a spy on them, and may not like their company. If you really want to know whether another person can talk well, begin by saying a good thing yourself, and you will have a right to look for a rejoinder. "The best tennis-players," says Sir Fopling Flutter, "make the best matches."

For wit is like a rest
Held up at tennis, which men do the best
With the best players.

We hear it often said of a great author, or a great actress, that they are very stupid people in private. But he was a fool that said so. *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners.* In conversation, as in other things, the action and reaction should bear a certain proportion to each other. Authors may, in some sense, be looked

upon as foreigners, who are not naturalized even in their native soil. Lamb once came down into the country to see us.¹ He was "like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths." The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would be strange if they had; for he did not make any while he stayed. But when we crossed the country to Oxford, then he spoke a little. He and the old colleges were "hail-fellow well met;" and in the quadrangles, he "walked gowned."

There is a character of a gentleman; so there is a character of a scholar, which is no less easily recognised. The one has an air of books about him, as the other has of good-breeding. The one wears his thoughts as the other does his clothes, gracefully; and even if they are a little old-fashioned, they are not ridiculous: they have had their day. The gentleman shows, by his manner, that he has been used to respect from others: the scholar that he lays claim to self-respect and to a certain independence of opinion. The one has been accustomed to the best company; the other has passed his time in cultivating an intimacy with the best authors. There is nothing forward or vulgar in the behaviour of the one; nothing shrewd or petulant in the observations of the other, as if he should astonish the bystanders, or was astonished himself at his own discoveries. Good taste and good sense, like common politeness, are, or are supposed to be, matters of course. One is distinguished by an appearance of marked attention to every one present; the other manifests an habitual air of abstraction and absence of mind. The one is not an upstart, with all the self-important airs of the founder of his own fortune; nor the other a self-taught man, with the repulsive self-sufficiency which arises from an ignorance of what hun-

¹ While the Author and Mrs. Hazlitt were staying at Winterslow, near Salisbury, in 1809. See *Mem. of W. H.*, i., 172-4.—ED.

dreds have known before him. We must excuse perhaps a little conscious family pride in the one, and a little harmless pedantry in the other. As there is a class of the first character which sinks into the mere gentleman, that is, which has nothing but this sense of respectability and propriety to support it—so the character of a scholar not unfrequently dwindles down into the shadow of a shade, till nothing is left of it but the mere bookworm. There is often something amiable as well as enviable in this last character. I know one such instance, at least. The person I mean has an admiration for learning, if he is only dazzled by its light. He lives among old authors, if he does not enter much into their spirit. He handles the covers, and turns over the page, and is familiar with the names and dates. He is busy and self-involved. He hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not be rudely brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow; but as such, he is respectable. He browses on the husk and leaves of books, as the young fawn browses on the bark and leaves of trees. Such a one lives all his life in a dream of learning, and has never once had his sleep broken by a real sense of things. He believes implicitly in genius, truth, virtue, liberty, because he finds the names of these things in books. He thinks that love and friendship are the finest things imaginable, both in practice and theory. The legend of good women is to him no fiction. When he steals from the twilight of his cell, the scene breaks upon him like an illuminated missal, and all the people he sees are but so many figures in a *camera obscura*. He reads the world, like a favourite volume, only to find beauties in it, or like an edition of some old work which he is preparing for the press, only to make emendations in it, and correct the errors that have inadvertently slipped in. He and his dog Tray are much the same honest, simple-hearted, faithful, affectionate creatures—if Tray

could but read ! His mind cannot take the impression of vice : but the gentleness of his nature turns gall to milk. He would not hurt a fly. He draws the picture of mankind from the guileless simplicity of his own heart : and when he dies, his spirit will take its smiling leave, without having ever had an ill thought of others, or the consciousness of one in itself !

On Reason and Imagination.

I HATE people who have no notion of anything but generalities, and forms, and creeds, and naked propositions, even worse than I dislike those who cannot for the soul of them arrive at the comprehension of an abstract idea. There are those (even among philosophers) who, deeming that all truth is contained within certain outlines and common topics, if you proceed to add colour or relief from individuality, protest against the use of rhetoric as an illogical thing ; and if you drop a hint of pleasure or pain as ever entering into "this breathing world," raise a prodigious outcry against all appeals to the passions.

It is, I confess, strange to me that men who pretend to more than usual accuracy in distinguishing and analysing, should insist that in treating of human nature, of moral good and evil, the nominal differences are alone of any value, or that in describing the feelings and motives of men, anything that conveys the smallest idea of what those feelings are in any given circumstances, or can by parity of reason ever be in any others, is a deliberate attempt at artifice and delusion—as if a knowledge or representation of things as they really exist (rules and definitions apart) was a proportionable departure from the truth. They stick to the table of contents, and never open the volume of the mind. They are for having maps, not pictures of the world we live in : as much as to say

that a bird's-eye view of things contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If you want to look for the situation of a particular spot, they turn to a pasteboard globe, on which they fix their wandering gaze ; and because you cannot find the object of your search in their bald "abridgements," tell you there is no such place, or that it is not worth inquiring after. They had better confine their studies to the celestial sphere and the signs of the zodiac ; for there they will meet with no petty details to boggle at, or contradict their vague conclusions. Such persons would make excellent theologians, but are very indifferent philosophers. To pursue this geographical reasoning a little farther.—They may say that the map of a country or shire, for instance, is too large, and conveys a disproportionate idea of its relation to the whole. And we say that their map of the globe is too small, and conveys no idea of it at all.

——— I' the world's volume
Our Britain shows as of it, but not in't ;
In a great pool a swan's nest :¹

but is it really so ? What ! the county is bigger than the map at any rate : the representation falls short of the reality by a million degrees, and you would omit it altogether in order to arrive at a balance of power in the nonentities of the understanding, and call this keeping within the bounds of sense and reason ; and whatever does not come within those self-made limits is to be set aside as frivolous or monstrous. But "there are more things between heaven and earth than were ever dreamt of in this philosophy." They cannot get them all in, *of the size of life*, and therefore they reduce them on a graduated scale, till they think they can. So be it, for certain necessary and general purposes, and in compliance with the infirmity of human intellect : but at other times, let us enlarge our conceptions to the dimensions of the original objects ; nor

¹ *Cymbeline*, iii. 4.

let it be pretended that we have outraged truth and nature, because we have encroached on your diminutive mechanical standard. There is no language, no description that can strictly come up to the truth and force of reality: all we have to do is to guide our descriptions and conclusions by the reality. A certain proportion must be kept: we must not invert the rules of moral perspective. Logic should enrich and invigorate its decisions by the use of imagination; as rhetoric should be governed in its application, and guarded from abuse by the checks of the understanding. Neither, I apprehend, is sufficient alone. The mind can conceive only one or a few things in their integrity: if it proceeds to more, it must have recourse to artificial substitutes, and judge by comparison merely. In the former case, it may select the least worthy, and so distort the truth of things, by giving a hasty preference: in the latter, the danger is that it may refine and abstract so much as to attach no idea at all to them corresponding with their practical value, or their influence on the minds of those concerned with them. Men act from individual impressions; and to know mankind, we should be acquainted with nature. Men act from passion; and we can only judge of passion by sympathy. Persons of the dry and husky class above spoken of, often seem to think even nature itself an interloper on their flimsy theories. They prefer the shadows in Plato's cave to the actual objects without it. They consider men "as nice in an air-pump," fit only for their experiments; and do not consider the rest of the universe, or "all the mighty world of eye and ear," as worth any notice at all. This is making short, but not sure work. Truth does not lie *in vacuo*, any more than in a well. We must improve our concrete experience of persons and things into the contemplation of general rules and principles; but without being grounded in individual facts and feelings, we shall end as we began, in ignorance.

It is mentioned in a short account of the *Last Moments of Mr. Fox*, that the conversation at the house of Lord Holland (where he died) turning upon Mr. Burke's style, that Noble Person objected to it as too gaudy and meretricious, and said that it was more profuse of flowers than fruit. On which Mr. Fox observed, that though this was a common objection, it appeared to him altogether an unfounded one; that on the contrary, the flowers often concealed the fruit beneath them, and the ornaments of style were rather an hindrance than an advantage to the sentiments they were meant to set off. In confirmation of this remark, he offered to take down the book, and translate a page anywhere into his own plain, natural style; and by his doing so, Lord Holland was convinced that he had often missed the thought from having his attention drawn off to the dazzling imagery. Thus people continually find fault with the colours of style as incompatible with the truth of the reasoning, but without any foundation whatever. If it were a question about the figure of two triangles, and any person were to object that one triangle was green and the other yellow, and bring this to bear upon the acuteness or obtuseness of the angles, it would be obvious to remark that the colour had nothing to do with the question. But in a dispute whether two objects are coloured alike, the discovery, that one is green and the other yellow, is fatal. So with respect to moral truth (as distinct from mathematical), whether a thing is good or evil, depends on the quantity of passion, of feeling, of pleasure and pain connected with it, and with which we must be made acquainted in order to come to a sound conclusion, and not on the inquiry whether it is round or square. Passion, in short, is the essence, the chief ingredient in moral truth; and the warmth of passion is sure to kindle the light of imagination on the objects around it. The "words that glow" are almost inseparable from the "thoughts that burn." Hence logical reason and practical

truth are *disparates*. It is easy to raise an outcry against violent invectives, to talk loud against extravagance and enthusiasm, to pick a quarrel with everything but the most calm, candid, and qualified statement of facts: but there are enormities to which no words can do adequate justice. Are we then, in order to form a complete idea of them, to omit every circumstance of aggravation, or to suppress every feeling of impatience that arises out of the details, lest we should be accused of giving way to the influence of prejudice and passion? This would be to falsify the impression altogether, to misconstrue reason, and fly in the face of nature. Suppose, for instance, that in the discussions on the Slave Trade, a description to the life was given of the horrors of the *Middle Passage* (as it was termed), that you saw the manner in which thousands of wretches, year after year, were stowed together in the hold of a slave-ship, without air, without light, without food, without hope, so that what they suffered in reality was brought home to you in imagination, till you felt in sickness of heart as one of them, could it be said that this was a prejudging of the case, that your knowing the extent of the evil disqualified you from pronouncing sentence upon it, and that your disgust and abhorrence were the effects of a heated imagination? No. Those evils that inflame the imagination and make the heart sick, ought not to leave the head cool. This is the very test and measure of the degree of the enormity, that it involuntarily staggers and appals the mind. If it were a common iniquity, if it were slight and partial, or necessary, it would not have this effect; but it very properly carries away the feelings, and (if you will) overpowers the judgment, because it is a mass of evil so monstrous and unwarranted as not to be endured even in thought. A man on the rack does not suffer the less because the extremity of anguish takes away his command of feeling and attention to appearances. A pang inflicted on humanity is not the less real because it

stirs up sympathy in the breast of humanity. Would you tame down the glowing language of justifiable passion into that of cold indifference, of self-complacent, sceptical reasoning, and thus take out the sting of indignation from the mind of the spectator? Not, surely, till you have removed the nuisance by the levers that strong feeling alone can set at work, and have thus taken away the pang of suffering that caused it! Or say that the question were proposed to you—whether, on some occasion, you should thrust your hand into the flames, and were coolly told that you were not at all to consider the pain and anguish it might give you, nor suffer yourself to be led away by any such idle appeals to natural sensibility, but to refer the decision to some abstract, technical ground of propriety,—would you not laugh in your adviser's face? Oh! no; where our own interests are concerned, or where we are sincere in our professions of regard, the pretended distinction between sound judgment and lively imagination is quickly done away with. But I would not wish a better or more philosophical standard of morality than that we should think and feel towards others as we should if it were our own case. If we look for a higher standard than this, we shall not find it; but shall lose the substance for the shadow! Again, suppose an extreme or individual instance is brought forward in any general question, as that of the cargo of sick slaves that were thrown overboard as so much *live lumber* by the captain of a Guinea vessel, in the year 1775, which was one of the things that first drew the attention of the public to this nefarious traffic,¹ or the practice of suspending contumacious negroes in cages to have their eyes pecked out, and to be devoured alive by birds of prey. Does this form no rule, because the mischief is solitary or excessive? The rule is absolute; for we feel that nothing of the kind could take place, or be tolerated for an instant, in any

¹ See *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, by Prince Hoare, Esq.

system that was not rotten at the core. If such things are ever done in any circumstances with impunity, we know what must be done every day under the same sanction. It shows that there is an utter deadness to every principle of justice or feeling of humanity; and where this is the case, we may take out our tables of abstraction, and set down what is to follow through every gradation of petty, galling vexation, and wanton, unrelenting cruelty. A state of things, where a single instance of the kind can possibly happen without exciting general consternation, ought not to exist for half an hour. The parent, hydra-headed injustice ought to be crushed at once with all its viper brood. Practices, the mention of which makes the flesh creep, and that affront the light of day, ought to be put down the instant they are known, without inquiry and without appeal.

There was an example of eloquent moral reasoning connected with this subject, given in the work just referred to, which was not the less solid and profound because it was produced by a burst of strong personal and momentary feeling. It is what follows:—"The name of a person having been mentioned in the presence of Naimbanna (a young African chieftain), who was understood by him to have publicly asserted something very degrading to the general character of Africans, he broke out into violent and vindictive language. He was immediately reminded of the Christian duty of forgiving his enemies; upon which he answered nearly in the following words:—'If a man should rob me of my money, I can forgive him; if a man should shoot at me, or try to stab me, I can forgive him; if a man should sell me and all my family to a slave-ship, so that we should pass all the rest of our days in slavery in the West Indies, I can forgive him; but' (added he, rising from his seat with much emotion) 'if a man takes away the character of the people of my country, I never can forgive him.' Being asked why he would not

extend his forgiveness to those who took away the character of the people of his country, he answered : ‘ If a man should try to kill me, or should sell me and my family for slaves, he would do an injury to as many as he might kill or sell ; but if anyone takes away the character of Black people, that man injures Black people all over the world ; and when he has once taken away their character, there is nothing which he may not do to Black people ever after. That man, for instance, will beat Black men, and say, *Oh, it is only a Black man, why should not I beat him ?* That man will make slaves of Black people ; for, when he has taken away their character, he will say, *Oh, they are only Black people, why should not I make them slaves ?* That man will take away all the people of Africa if he can catch them ; and if you ask him, But why do you take away all these people ? he will say, *Oh, they are only Black people—they are not like White people—why should I not take them ?* That is the reason why I cannot forgive the man who takes away the character of the people of my country.’ ”¹

I conceive more real light and vital heat is thrown into the argument by this struggle of natural feeling to relieve itself from the weight of a false and injurious imputation, than would be added to it by twenty volumes of tables and calculations of the *pros* and *cons* of right and wrong, of utility and inutility, in Mr. Bentham’s handwriting. In allusion to this celebrated person’s theory of morals, I will here go a step farther, and deny that the dry calculation of consequences is the sole and unqualified test of right and wrong ; for we are to take into the account (as well) the re-action of these consequences upon the mind of the individual and the community. In morals, the cultivation of a *moral sense* is not the last thing to be attended to—nay, it is the first. Almost the only unsophisticated or spirited remark that we meet with in Paley’s *Moral*

¹ *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, p. 369.

Philosophy, is one which is always to be found in Tucker's *Light of Nature*—namely, that in dispensing charity to common beggars we are not to consider so much the good it may do the object of it, as the harm it will do the person who refuses it. A sense of compassion is involuntarily excited by the immediate appearance of distress, and a violence and injury is done to the kindly feelings by withholding the obvious relief, the trifling pittance in our power. This is a remark, I think, worthy of the ingenious and amiable author from whom Paley borrowed it. So with respect to the atrocities committed in the slave-trade, it could not be set up as a doubtful plea in their favour, that the actual and intolerable sufferings inflicted on the individuals were compensated by certain advantages in a commercial and political point of view—in a moral sense they *cannot* be compensated. They hurt the public mind: they harden and sear the natural feelings. The evil is monstrous and palpable; the pretended good is remote and contingent. In morals, as in philosophy, *De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio*. What does not touch the heart, or come home to the feelings, goes comparatively for little or nothing. A benefit that exists merely in possibility, and is judged of only by the forced dictates of the understanding, is not a set-off against an evil (say of equal magnitude in itself) that strikes upon the senses, that haunts the imagination, and lacerates the human heart. A spectacle of deliberate cruelty, that shocks everyone that sees and hears of it, is not to be justified by any calculations of cold-blooded self-interest—is not to be permitted in any case. It is prejudged and self-condemned. Necessity has been therefore justly called “the tyrant’s plea.” It is no better with the mere doctrine of utility, which is the sophist’s plea. Thus, for example, an infinite number of lumps of sugar put into Mr. Bentham’s artificial ethical scales would never weigh against the pounds of human flesh, or drops of human

blood, that are sacrificed to produce them. The taste of the former on the palate is evanescent; but the others sit heavy on the soul. The one are an object to the imagination: the others only to the understanding. But man is an animal compounded both of imagination and understanding; and, in treating of what is good for man's nature, it is necessary to consider both. A calculation of the mere ultimate advantages, without regard to natural feelings and affections, may improve the external face and physical comforts of society, but will leave it heartless and worthless in itself. In a word, the sympathy of the individual with the consequences of his own act is to be attended to (no less than the consequences themselves) in every sound system of morality; and this must be determined by certain natural laws of the human mind, and not by rules of logic or arithmetic.

The aspect of a moral question is to be judged of very much like the face of a country, by the projecting points, by what is striking and memorable, by that which leaves traces of itself behind, or "casts its shadows before." Millions of acres do not make a picture; nor the calculation of all the consequences in the world a sentiment. We must have some outstanding object for the mind, as well as the eye, to dwell on and to recur to—something marked and decisive to give a tone and texture to the moral feelings. Not only is the attention thus roused and kept alive; but what is most important as to the principles of action, the desire of good or hatred of evil is powerfully excited. But all individual facts and history come under the head of what these people call *Imagination*. All full, true, and particular accounts they consider as romantic, ridiculous, vague, inflammatory. As a case in point, one of this school of thinkers declares that he was qualified to write a better History of India from having never been there than if he had, as the last might lead to local distinctions or party-prejudices; that is to say, that

he could describe a country better at secondhand than from original observation, or that from having seen no one object, place, or person, he could do ampler justice to the whole. It might be maintained, much on the same principle, that an artist would paint a better likeness of a person after he was dead, from description or different sketches of the face, than from having seen the individual living man. On the contrary, I humbly conceive that the seeing half a dozen wandering Lascars in the streets of London gives one a better idea of the soul of India, that cradle of the world, and (as it were) garden of the sun, than all the charts, records, and statistical reports that can be sent over, even under the classical administration of Mr. Canning. *Ab uno disce omnes.* One Hindoo differs more from a citizen of London than he does from all other Hindoos; and by seeing the two first, man to man, you know comparatively and essentially what they are, nation to nation. By a very few specimens you fix the great leading differences which are the same throughout. Any one thing is a better representative of its kind than all the words and definitions in the world can be. The sum-total is indeed different from the particulars; but it is not easy to guess at any general result, without some previous induction of particulars and appeal to experience.

What can we reason, but from what we know?

Again, it is quite wrong, instead of the most striking illustrations of human nature, to single out the 'stalest and tritest, as if they were most authentic and infallible; not considering that from the extremes you may infer the means, but you cannot from the means infer the extremes in any case. It may be said that the extreme and individual cases may be retorted upon us:—I deny it, unless it be with truth. The imagination is an *associating* principle; and has an instinctive perception when a thing belongs to a system, or is an exception to it. For instance,

the excesses committed by the victorious besiegers of a town do not attach to the nation committing them, but to the nature of that sort of warfare, and are common to both sides. They may be struck off the score of natural prejudices. The cruelties exercised upon slaves, on the other hand, grow out of the relation between master and slave; and the mind intuitively revolts at them as such. The cant about the horrors of the French Revolution is mere cant—everybody knows it to be so; each party would have retaliated upon the other: it was a civil war, like that for a disputed succession; the general principle of the right or wrong of the change remained untouched. Neither would these horrors have taken place, except from Prussian manifestoes, and treachery within: there were none in the American, and have been none in the Spanish Revolution. The massacre of St. Bartholomew arose out of the principles of that religion which exterminates with fire and sword, and keeps no faith with heretics. If it be said that nicknames, party watchwords, bugbears, the cry of “No Popery,” &c., are continually played off upon the imagination with the most mischievous effect, I answer that most of these bugbears and terms of vulgar abuse have arisen out of abstruse speculation or barbarous prejudice, and have seldom had their root in real facts or natural feelings. Besides, are not general topics, rules, exceptions, endlessly bandied to and fro, and balanced one against the other by the most learned disputants? Have not three-fourths of all the wars, schisms, heartburnings in the world begun on mere points of controversy? There are two classes whom I have found given to this kind of reasoning against the use of our senses and feelings in what concerns human nature, viz., knaves and fools. The last do it because they think their own shallow dogmas settle all questions best without any farther appeal; and the first do it because they know that the refinements of the head are more easily got rid of than the

suggestions of the heart, and that a strong sense of injustice, excited by a particular case in all its aggravations, tells more against them than all the distinctions of the jurists. Facts, concrete existences, are stubborn things, and are not so soon tampered with or turned about to any point we please, as mere names and abstractions. Of these last it may be said,

A breath can *mar* them, whom a breath has made:

and they are liable to be puffed away by every wind of doctrine, or baffled by every plea of convenience. I wonder that Rousseau gave in to this cant about the want of soundness in rhetorical and imaginative reasoning; and was so fond of this subject as to make an abridgment of Plato's rhapsodies upon it, by which he was led to expel poets from his commonwealth. Thus two of the most flowery writers are those who have exacted the greatest severity of style from others. Rousseau was too ambitious of an exceedingly technical and scientific mode of reasoning, scarcely attainable in the mixed questions of human life (as may be seen in his *Social Contract*—a work of great ability but extreme formality of structure), and it is probable he was led into this error in seeking to overcome his too great warmth of natural temperament to indulge merely the impulses of passion. Burke, who was a man of fine imagination, had the good sense (without any of this false modesty) to defend the moral uses of the imagination, and is himself one of the grossest instances of its abuse.

It is not merely the fashion among philosophers—the poets also have got into a way of scouting individuality as beneath the sublimity of their pretensions, and the universality of their genius. The philosophers have become mere logicians, and their rivals mere rhetoricians; for as these last must float on the surface, and are not allowed to be harsh and crabbed and recondite like the others, by leaving out the individual, they become commonplace.

They cannot reason, and they must declaim. Modern tragedy, in particular, is no longer like a vessel making the voyage of life, and tossed about by the winds and waves of passion, but is converted into a handsomely-constructed steamboat that is moved by the sole expansive power of words. Lord Byron has launched several of these ventures lately (if ventures they may be called) and may continue in the same strain as long as he pleases. We have not now a number of *dramatis personæ* affected by particular incidents and speaking according to their feelings, or as the occasion suggests, but each mounting the rostrum, and delivering his opinion on fate, fortune, and the entire consummation of things. The individual is not of sufficient importance to occupy his own thoughts or the thoughts of others. The poet fills his page with *grandes pensées*. He covers the face of nature with the beauty of his sentiments and the brilliancy of his paradoxes. We have the subtleties of the head, instead of the workings of the heart, and possible justifications instead of the actual motives of conduct. This all seems to proceed on a false estimate of individual nature and the value of human life. We have been so used to count by millions of late, that we think the units that compose them nothing; and are so prone to trace remote principles, that we neglect the immediate results. As an instance of the opposite style of dramatic dialogue, in which the persons speak for themselves, and to one another, I will give, by way of illustration, a passage from an old tragedy, in which a brother has just caused his sister to be put to a violent death.

Bosola. Fix your eye here.

Ferdinand. Constantly.

Bosola. Do you not weep?

Other sins only speak; murder shrieks out:

The element of water moistens the earth;

But blood flies upwards, and bedews the heavens.

Ferdinand. Cover her face : mine eyes dazzle ; she died young.

Bosola. I think not so : her infelicity
Seem'd to have years too many.

Ferdinand. She and I were twins :
And should I die this instant, I had lived
Her time to a minute.¹

How fine is the constancy with which he first fixes his eye on the dead body, with a forced courage, and then, as his resolution wavers, how natural is his turning his face away, and the reflection that strikes him on her youth and beauty and untimely death, and the thought that they were twins, and his measuring his life by hers up to the present period, as if all that was to come of it were nothing ! Now, I would fain ask whether there is not in this contemplation of the interval that separates the beginning from the end of life, of a life, too, so varied from good to ill, and of the pitiable termination of which the person speaking has been the wilful and guilty cause, enough to “ give the mind pause ? ” Is not that revelation as it were of the whole extent of our being which is made by the flashes of passion and stroke of calamity, a subject sufficiently staggering to have place in legitimate tragedy ? Are not the struggles of the will with untoward events and the adverse passions of others as interesting and instructive in the representation as reflections on the mutability of fortune or inevitableness of destiny, or on the passions of men in general ? The tragic Muse does not merely utter muffled sounds : but we see the paleness on the cheek, and the lifeblood gushing from the heart ! The interest we take in our own lives, in our successes or disappointments, and the *home*-feelings that arise out of these, when well described, are the clearest and truest mirror in which we can see the image of human nature. For in this sense each man is a microcosm. What he is, the rest are ;

¹ *Duchess of Malfy*, Act iv. Scene 2. [Webster's Works, ed. Hazlitt, ii. 247-8.]

whatever his joys and sorrows are composed of, theirs are the same—no more, no less.

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

But it must be the genuine touch of nature, not the outward flourishes and varnish of art. The spouting, oracular, didactic figure of the poet no more answers to the living man, than the lay-figure of the painter does. We may well say to such a one—

- Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
That thou dost glare with: thy bones are marrowless,
Thy blood is cold!

Man is (so to speak) an endless and infinitely varied repetition: and if we know what one man feels, we so far know what a thousand feel in the sanctuary of their being. Our feeling of general humanity is at once an aggregate of a thousand different truths, and it is also the same truth a thousand times told. As is our perception of this original truth, the root of our imagination, so will the force and richness of the general impression proceeding from it be. The boundary of our sympathy is a circle which enlarges itself according to its propulsion from the centre—the heart. If we are imbued with a deep sense of individual weal or woe, we shall be awestruck at the idea of humanity in general. If we know little of it but its abstract and common properties, without their particular application, their force or degrees, we shall care just as little as we know either about the whole or the individuals. If we understand the texture and vital feeling, we then can fill up the outline, but we cannot supply the former from having the latter given. Moral and poetical truth is like expression in a picture—the one is not to be attained by smearing over a large canvas, nor the other by bestriding a vague topic. In such matters, the most pompous sciolists are accordingly found to be the greatest

contemners of human life. But I defy any great tragie writer to despise that nature which he understands, or that heart which he has probed, with all its rich bleeding materials of joy and sorrow. The subject may not be a source of much triumph to him, from its alternate light and shade, but it can never become one of supercilious indifference. He must feel a strong reflex interest in it, corresponding to that which he has depicted in the characters of others. Indeed, the object and end of playing, "both at the first and now, is to hold the mirror up to nature," to enable us to feel for others as for ourselves, or to embody a distinct interest out of ourselves by the force of imagination and passion. This is summed up in the wish of the poet—

To feel what others are, and know myself a man.

If it does not do this, it loses both its dignity and its proper use.

On Application to Study.

No one is idle who can do anything. It is conscious inability, or the sense of repeated failure, that prevents us from undertaking, or deters us from the prosecution of any work.

Wilson, the painter, might be mentioned as an exception to this rule, for he was said to be an indolent man. After bestowing a few touches on a picture, he grew tired, and said to any friend who called in, "Now, let us go somewhere!" But the fact is, that Wilson could not finish his pictures minutely; and that those few masterly touches, carelessly thrown in of a morning, were all that he could do. The rest would have been labour lost. Morland has been referred to as another man of genius, who can only be brought to work by fits

and snatches. But his landscapes and figures (whatever degree of merit they might possess) were mere hasty sketches; and he could produce all that he was capable of, in the first half-hour, as well as in twenty years. Why bestow additional pains without additional effect? What he did was from the impulse of the moment, from the lively impression of some coarse but striking object; and with that impulse his efforts ceased, as they justly ought. There is no use in labouring, *invitâ Minerva*—nor any difficulty in it, when the Muse is not averse.

The labour we delight in physics pain.

Denner finished his unmeaning portraits with a microscope, and without being ever weary of his fruitless task; for the essence of his genius was industry. Sir Joshua Reynolds, courted by the Graces and by Fortune, was hardly ever out of his painting-room; and lamented a few days at any time spent at a friend's house or at a nobleman's seat in the country, as so much time lost. That darkly-illuminated room "to him a kingdom was:" his pencil was the sceptre that he wielded, and the throne on which his sitters were placed, a throne for Fame. Here he felt indeed at home; here the current of his ideas flowed full and strong; here he felt most self-possession, most command over others; and the sense of power urged him on to his delightful task with a sort of vernal cheerfulness and vigour, even in the decline of life. The feeling of weakness and incapacity would have made his hand soon falter, would have rebuffed him from his object; or had the canvas mocked, and been insensible to his toil, instead of gradually turning to

A lucid mirror, in which nature saw
All her reflected features,

he would, like so many others, have thrown down his pencil in despair, or proceeded reluctantly, without spirit

and without success. Claude Lorraine, in like manner, spent whole mornings on the banks of the Tiber or in his study, eliciting beauty after beauty, adding touch to touch, getting nearer and nearer to perfection, luxuriating in endless felicity—not merely giving the salient points, but filling up the whole intermediate space with continuous grace and beauty! What farther motive was necessary to induce him to persevere, but the bounty of his fate? What greater pleasure could he seek for, than that of seeing the perfect image of his mind reflected in the work of his hand? But as is the pleasure and the confidence produced by consummate skill, so is the pain and the desponding effect of total failure. When for the fair face of nature, we only see an unsightly blot issuing from our best endeavours, then the nerves slacken, the tears fill the eyes, and the painter turns away from his art, as the lover from a mistress, that scorns him. Alas! how many such have, as the poet says,

Begun in gladness ;

Whereof has come in the end despondency and madness—

not for want of will to proceed, (oh! no,) but for lack of power

Hence it is that those often do best (up to a certain point of commonplace success) who have least knowledge and least ambition to excel. Their taste keeps pace with their capacity ; and they are not deterred by insurmountable difficulties, of which they have no idea. I have known artists (for instance) of considerable merit, and a certain native rough strength and resolution of mind, who have been active and enterprising in their profession, but who never seemed to think of any works but those which they had in hand ; they never spoke of a picture, or appeared to have seen one : to them Titian, Raphael, Rubens, Rembrandt, Correggio, were as if they had never been : no tones, mellowed by time to soft perfection,

lured them to their luckless doom, no divine forms baffled their vain embrace; no sound of immortality rang in their ears, or drew off their attention from the calls of creditors or of hunger: they walked through collections of the finest works, like the "Children in the Fiery Furnace," untouched, unapproached. With these true *terræ filii* the art seemed to begin and end: they thought only of the subject of their next production, the size of their next canvas, the grouping, the getting of the figures in; and conducted their work to its conclusion with as little distraction of mind and as few misgivings as a stage-coachman conducts a stage, or a carrier delivers a bale of goods, according to its destination. Such persons, if they do not rise above, at least seldom sink below themselves. They do not soar to the "highest heaven of invention," nor penetrate the inmost recesses of the heart; but they succeed in all that they attempt, or are capable of, as men of business and industry in their calling. For them the veil of the Temple of Art is not rent asunder, and it is well: one glimpse of the Sanctuary, of the Holy of the Holies, might palsy their hands, and dim their sight for ever after!

I think there are two mistakes, common enough, on this subject—viz., that men of genius, or of first-rate capacity, do little, except by intermittent fits, or *per saltum*—and that they do that little in a slight and slovenly manner. There may be instances of this; but they are not the highest, and they are the exceptions, not the rule. On the contrary, the greatest artists have in general been the most prolific or the most elaborate, as the best writers have been frequently the most voluminous as well as indefatigable. We have a great living instance among writers, that the quality of a man's productions is not to be estimated in the inverse ratio of their quantity—I mean in the Author of *Waverley*; the fecundity of whose pen is no less admirable than its felicity. Shakespeare is

another instance of the same prodigality of genius; his materials being endlessly poured forth with no niggard or fastidious hand, and the mastery of the execution being (in many respects at least) equal to the boldness of the design. As one example among others that I might cite of the attention which he gave to his subject, it is sufficient to observe, that there is scarcely a word in any of his more striking passages that can be altered for the better. If any person, for instance, is trying to recollect a favourite line, and cannot hit upon some particular expression, it is in vain to think of substituting any other so good. That in the original text is not merely the best, but it seems the only right one. I will stop to illustrate this point a little. I was at a loss the other day for the line in Henry V.—

Nice customs curtesy to great kings.

I could not recollect the word *nice*: I tried a number of others, such as *old*, *grave*, &c.—they would none of them do, but seemed all heavy, lumbering, or from the purpose: the word *nice*, on the contrary, appeared to drop into its place, and be ready to assist in paying the reverence required. Again—

A jest's *prosperity* lies in the ear
Of him that hears it.

I thought in quoting from memory, of “A jest's *success*,” “A jest's *renown*,” &c. I then turned to the volume, and there found the very word that of all others expressed the idea. Had Shakespeare searched through the four quarters of the globe, he could not have lighted on another to convey so exactly what he meant—a *casual*, *hollow*, *sounding* success! I could multiply such examples, but that I am sure the reader will easily supply them himself; and they show sufficiently that Shakespeare was not (as he is often represented) a loose or clumsy writer. The bold

happy texture of his style, in which every word is prominent, and yet cannot be torn from its place without violence, any more than a limb from the body, is (one should think) the result either of vigilant painstaking or of unerring, intuitive perception, and not the mark of crude conceptions, and "the random, blindfold blows of Ignorance."

There cannot be a greater contradiction to the common prejudice that "Genius is naturally a truant and a vagabond," than the astonishing and (on this hypothesis) unaccountable number of *chefs-d'œuvre* left behind them by the old masters. The stream of their invention supplies the taste of successive generations like a river: they furnish a hundred galleries, and preclude competition, not more by the excellence than by the number of their performances. Take Raphael and Rubens alone. There are works of theirs in single collections enough to occupy a long and laborious life, and yet their works are spread through all the collections of Europe. They seem to have cost them no more labour than if they "had drawn in their breath and puffed it forth again." But we know that they made drawings, studies, sketches, of all the principal of these, with the care and caution of the merest tyros in the art; and they remain equal proofs of their capacity and diligence. The cartoons of Raphael alone might have employed many years, and made a life of illustrious labour, though they look as if they had been struck off at a blow, and are not a tenth part of what he produced in his short but bright career. Titian and Michael Angelo lived longer, but they worked as hard and did as well. Shall we bring in competition with examples like these some trashy caricaturist or idle dauber, who has no sense of the infinite resources of nature or art, nor consequently any power to employ himself upon them for any length of time or to any purpose, to prove that genius and regular industry are incompatible qualities?

In my opinion, the very superiority of the works of the great painters (instead of being a bar to) accounts for their multiplicity. Power is pleasure; and pleasure sweetens pain. A fine poet thus describes the effect of the sight of nature on his mind :

———— The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms were then to me
An appetite, a feeling, and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

So the forms of nature, or the human form divine, stood before the great artists of old, nor required any other stimulus to lead the eye to survey, or the hand to embody them, than the pleasure derived from the inspiration of the subject, and “propulsive force” of the mimic creation. The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed. They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generation of truth and beauty. Success prompts to exertion; and habit facilitates success. It is idle to suppose we can exhaust nature; and the more we employ our own faculties, the more we strengthen them and enrich our stores of observation and invention. The more we do, the more we *can* do. Not indeed if we *get our ideas out of our own heads*—that stock is soon exhausted, and we recur to tiresome, vapid imitations of ourselves. But this is the difference between real and mock talent, between genius and affectation. Nature is not limited, nor does it become effete, like our conceit and vanity. The closer we examine it, the more it refines upon us; it expands as we enlarge and shift our view; it “grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength.” The subjects are endless; and our capacity

is invigorated as it is called out by occasion and necessity. He who does nothing, renders himself incapable of doing anything ; but while we are executing any work, we are preparing and qualifying ourselves to undertake another. The principles are the same in all nature ; and we understand them better, as we verify them by experience and practice. It is not as if there were a given number of subjects to work upon, or a set of *innate* or preconceived ideas in our minds which we encroached upon with every new design ; the subjects, as I said before, are endless, and we acquire ideas by imparting them. Our expenditure of intellectual wealth makes us rich : we can only be liberal as we have previously accumulated the means. By lying idle, as by standing still, we are confined to the same trite, narrow round of topics : by continuing our efforts, as by moving forwards in a road, we extend our views, and discover continually new tracts of country. Genius, like humanity, rusts for want of use.

Habit also gives promptness ; and the soul of despatch is decision. One man may write a book or paint a picture, while another is deliberating about the plan or the titlepage. The great painters were able to do so much, because they knew exactly what they meant to do, and how to set about it. They were thoroughbred workmen, and were not learning their art while they were exercising it. One can do a great deal in a short time if one only knows how. Thus an author may become very voluminous, who only employs an hour or two in a day in study. If he has once obtained, by habit and reflection, a use of his pen, with plenty of materials to work upon, the pages vanish before him. The time lost is in beginning, or in stopping after we have begun. If we only go forward with spirit and confidence, we shall soon arrive at the end of our journey. A practised writer ought never to hesitate for a sentence from the

moment he sets pen to paper, or think about the course he is to take. He must trust to his previous knowledge of the subject and to his immediate impulses, and he will get to the close of his task without accidents or loss of time. I can easily understand how the old divines and controversialists produced their folios: I could write folios myself, if I rose early and sat up late at this kind of occupation. But I confess I should soon be tired of it, besides wearying the reader.

In one sense, art is long and life is short. In another sense, this aphorism is not true. The best of us are idle half our time. It is wonderful how much is done in a short space, provided we set about it properly, and give our minds wholly to it. Let anyone devote himself to any art or science ever so strenuously, and he will still have leisure to make considerable progress in half a dozen other acquirements. Leonardo da Vinci was a mathematician, a musician, a poet, and an anatomist, besides being one of the greatest painters of his age. The Prince of Painters was a courtier, a lover, and fond of dress and company. Michael Angelo was a prodigy of versatility of talent—a writer of Sonnets (which Wordsworth has thought worth translating) and the admirer of Dante. Salvator was a lutenist and a satirist. Titian was an elegant letter-writer and a finished gentleman. Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses* are polished and classical even than any of his pictures. Let a man do all he can in any one branch of study, he must either exhaust himself and doze over it, or vary his pursuit, or else lie idle. All our real labour lies in a nutshell. The mind makes, at some period or other, one herculean effort, and the rest is mechanical. We have to climb a steep and narrow precipice at first; but after that, the way is broad and easy, where we may drive several accomplishments abreast. Men should have one principal pursuit, which may be both agreeably and advantageously diversified

with other lighter ones, as the subordinate parts of a picture may be managed so as to give effect to the centre group. It has been observed by a sensible man,¹ that the having a regular occupation or professional duties to attend to 'is no excuse for putting forth an inelegant or inaccurate work; for a habit of industry braces and strengthens the mind, and enables it to wield its energies with additional ease and steadier purpose. Were I allowed to instance in myself, if what I write at present is worth nothing, at least it costs me nothing. But it cost me a great deal twenty years ago. I have added little to my stock since then, and taken little from it. I "unfold the book and volume of the brain," and transcribe the characters I see there as mechanically as anyone might copy the letters in a sampler. I do not say they came there mechanically—I transfer them to the paper mechanically. After eight or ten years' hard study, an author (at least) may go to sleep.

I do not conceive rapidity of execution necessarily implies slovenliness or crudeness. On the contrary, I believe it is often productive both of sharpness and freedom. The eagerness of composition strikes out sparkles of fancy, and runs the thoughts more naturally and closely into one another. There may be less formal method, but there is more life, and spirit, and truth. In the play and agitation of the mind, it runs over, and we dally with the subject, as the glassblower rapidly shapes the vitreous fluid. A number of new thoughts rise up spontaneously, and they come in the proper places, because they arise from the occasion. They are also sure to partake of the warmth and vividness of that ebullition of mind, from which they spring. *Spiritus precipitandus est.* In these sort of voluntaries in composition, the

¹ The Rev. W. Shepherd, of Gateacre, in the Preface to his *Life of Poggio*.

thoughts are worked up to a state of projection: the grasp of the subject, the presence of mind, the flow of expression must be something akin to *extempore* speaking; or perhaps such bold but finished draughts may be compared to *fresco* paintings, which imply a life of study and great previous preparation, but of which the execution is momentary and irrevocable. I will add a single remark on a point that has been much disputed. Mr. Cobbett lays it down that the first word that occurs is always the best. I would venture to differ from so great an authority. Mr. Cobbett himself indeed writes as easily and as well as he talks; but he perhaps is hardly a rule for others without his practice and without his ability. In the hurry of composition three or four words may present themselves, one on the back of the other, and the last may be the best and right one. I grant thus much, that it is in vain to seek for the word we want, or endeavour to get it at secondhand, or as a paraphrase on some other word—it must come of itself, or arise out of an immediate impression or lively intuition of the subject; that is, the proper word must be suggested immediately by the thoughts, but it need not be presented as soon as called for. It is the same in trying to recollect the names of places, persons, &c. We cannot force our memory; they must come of themselves by natural association, as it were; but they may occur to us when we least think of it, owing to some casual circumstance or link of connexion, and long after we have given up the search. Proper expressions rise to the surface from the heat and fermentation of the mind, like bubbles on an agitated stream. It is this which produces a clear and sparkling style.

In painting, great execution supplies the place of high finishing. A few vigorous touches, properly and rapidly disposed, will often give more of the appearance and texture (even) of natural objects than the most heavy and

laborious details. But this masterly style of execution is very different from coarse daubing. I do not think, however, that the pains or polish an artist bestows upon his works necessarily interferes with their number. He only grows more enamoured of his task, proportionally patient, indefatigable, and devotes more of the day to study. The time we lose is not in overdoing what we are about, but in doing nothing. Rubens had great facility of execution, and seldom went into the details. Yet Raphael, whose oil-pictures were exact and laboured, achieved, according to the length of time he lived, very nearly as much as he. In filling up the parts of his pictures, and giving them the last perfection they were capable of, he filled up his leisure hours, which otherwise would have lain idle on his hands. I have sometimes accounted for the slow progress of certain artists from the unfinished state in which they have left their works at last. These were evidently done by fits and throes—there was no appearance of continuous labour—one figure had been thrown in at a venture, and then another; and in the intervals between these convulsive and random efforts, more time had been wasted than could have been spent in working up each individual figure on the sure principles of art, and by a careful inspection of nature, to the utmost point of practicable perfection.

Some persons are afraid of their own works; and having made one or two successful efforts, attempt nothing ever after. They stand still midway in the road to fame, from being startled at the shadow of their own reputation. This is a needless alarm. If what they have already done possesses real power, this will increase with exercise; if it has not this power, it is not sufficient to ensure them lasting fame. Such delicate pretenders tremble on the brink of *ideal* perfection, like dewdrops on the edge of flowers; and are fascinated, like so many Narcissuses, with the image of themselves, reflected from the public

admiration. It is seldom, indeed, that this cautious repose will answer its end. While seeking to sustain our reputation at the height, we are forgotten. Shakespear gave different advice, and himself acted upon it.

—Perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright. To have done, is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail,
In monumental mockery. Take th' instant way ;
For honour travels in a strait so narrow,
Where one but goes abreast : keep, then, the path ;
For emulation hath a thousand sons,
That one by one pursue : if you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,
And leave you hindmost :
Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,
Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,
O'errun and trampled on : then what they do in present,
Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours :
For time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
Grasps-in the comer : welcome ever smiles,
And farewell goes out sighing. O, let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was ;
For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating Time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,—
That all, with one consent, praise newborn gauds,
Though they are made and moulded of things past ;
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o'er dusted.
The present eye praises the present object.¹

I cannot very well conceive how it is that some writers (even of taste and genius) spend whole years in mere corrections for the press, as it were—in polishing a line or adjusting a comma. They take long to consider,

¹ *Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 3. [Dyce's Second Edit. 1868, vi., 57.]

exactly as there is nothing worth the trouble of a moment's thought; and the more they deliberate, the farther they are from deciding: for their fastidiousness increases with the indulgence of it, nor is there any real ground for preference. They are in the situation of Ned Softly, in the *Tatler*, who was a whole morning debating whether a line of a poetical epistle should run—

You sing your song with so much art;

or,

Your song you sing with so much art.

These are points that it is impossible ever to come to a determination about; and it is only a proof of a little mind ever to have entertained the question at all.

There is a class of persons whose minds seem to move in an element of littleness; or rather, that are entangled in trifling difficulties, and incapable of extricating themselves from them. There was a remarkable instance of this improgressive, ineffectual, restless activity of temper in a late celebrated and very ingenious landscape-painter. "Never ending, still beginning," his mind seemed entirely made up of points and fractions, nor could he by any means arrive at a conclusion or a valuable whole. He made it his boast that he never sat with his hands before him, and yet he never did anything. His powers and his time were frittered away in an importunate, uneasy, fidgety attention to little things. The first picture he ever painted (when a mere boy) was a copy of his father's house; and he began it by counting the number of bricks in the front upwards and lengthways, and then made a scale of them on his canvas. This literal style and mode of study stuck to him to the last. He was put under Wilson, whose example (if any could) might have cured him of this pettiness of conception; but nature prevailed, as it almost always does. To take pains to no purpose, seemed to be his motto, and the delight of his

life. He left (when he died, not long ago) heaps of canvases with elaborately-finished pencil outlines on them, and with perhaps a little dead colouring added here and there. In this state they were thrown aside, as if he grew tired of his occupation the instant it gave a promise of turning to account, and his whole object in the pursuit of art was to erect scaffoldings. The same intense interest in the most frivolous things extended to the common concerns of life, to the arranging of his letters, the labelling of his books, and the inventory of his wardrobe. Yet he was a man of sense, who saw the folly and the waste of time in all this, and could warn others against it. The perceiving our own weaknesses enables us to give others excellent advice, but it does not teach us to reform them ourselves. "Physician, heal thyself!" is the hardest lesson to follow. Nobody knew better than our artist that repose is necessary to great efforts, and that he who is never idle, labours in vain!

Another error is to spend one's life in procrastination and preparations for the future. Persons of this turn of mind stop at the threshold of art, and accumulate the means of improvement, till they obstruct their progress to the end. They are always putting off the evil day, and excuse themselves for doing nothing by commencing some new and indispensable course of study. Their projects are magnificent, but remote, and require years to complete or to put them in execution. Fame is seen in the horizon, and flies before them. Like the recreant boastful knight in Spenser, they turn their backs on their competitors, to make a great career, but never return to the charge. They make themselves masters of anatomy, of drawing, of perspective: they collect prints, casts, medallions; make studies of heads, of hands, of the bones, the muscles; copy pictures; visit Italy, Greece, and return as they went. They fulfil the proverb, "When you are at Rome, you must do as those at Rome do." This circuitous,

erratic pursuit of art can come to no good. It is only an apology for idleness and vanity. Foreign travel especially makes men pedants, not artists. What we seek, we must find at home or nowhere. The way to do great things is to set about something, and he who cannot find resources in himself or in his own painting-room, will perform the grand tour, or go through the circle of arts and sciences, and end just where he began!

The same remarks that have been here urged with respect to an application to the study of art, will in a great measure (though not in every particular) apply to an attention to business: I mean that exertion will generally follow success and opportunity in the one, as it does confidence and talent in the other. Give a man a motive to work, and he will work. A lawyer who is regularly fed, seldom neglects to look over his briefs: the more business, the more industry. The stress laid upon early rising is preposterous. If we have anything to do when we get up, we shall not lie in bed, to a certainty. Thomson the poet was found late in bed by Dr. Burney, and asked why he had not risen earlier. The Scotchman wisely answered, "I had no motive, young man!" What indeed had he to do after writing the *Seasons*, but to dream out the rest of his existence, unless it were to write the *Castle of Indolence*! ¹

On Londoners and Country People.

I do not agree with *Mr. Blackwood* in his definition of the word "Cockney." *He* means by it a person who has

¹ Schoolboys attend to their tasks as soon as they acquire a relish for study, and apply to that for which they find they have a capacity. If a boy shows no inclination for the Latin tongue, it is a sign he has not a turn for learning languages. Yet he dances well. Give up the thought of making a scholar of him, and bring him up to be a dancing-master!

happened at any time to live in London, and who is not a Tory : *I* mean by it a person who has never lived out of London, and who has got all his ideas from it.

The true Cockney has never travelled beyond the purlieus of the metropolis, either in the body or the spirit. Primrose Hill is the *Ultima Thule* of his most romantic desires ; Greenwich Park stands him in stead of the Vales of Arcady. Time and space are lost to him. He is confined to one spot, and to the present moment. He sees everything near, superficial, little, in hasty succession. The world turns round, and his head with it, like a roundabout at a fair, till he becomes stunned and 'giddy with the motion. Figures glide by as in a *camera obscura*. There is a glare, a perpetual hubbub, a noise, a crowd about him ; he sees and hears a vast number of things, and knows nothing. He is pert, raw, ignorant, conceited, ridiculous, shallow, contemptible. His senses keep him alive ; and he knows, inquires, and cares for nothing further. He meets the Lord Mayor's coach, and without ceremony treats himself to an imaginary ride in it. He notices the people going to court or to a city-feast, and is quite satisfied with the show. He takes the wall of a lord, and fancies himself as good as he. He sees an infinite quantity of people pass along the street, and thinks there is no such thing as life or a knowledge of character to be found out of London. "Beyond Hyde Park all is a desert to him." He despises the country because he is ignorant of it, and the town because he is familiar with it. He is as well acquainted with St. Paul's as if he had built it, and talks of Westminster Abbey and Poets' Corner with great indifference. The King, the House of Lords, and Commons, are his very good friends. He knows the Members for Westminster or the City by sight, and bows to the sheriffs or the sheriffs' men. He is hand-and-glove with the chairman of some committee. He is, in short, a great man by proxy, and comes so often

in contact with fine persons and things, that he rubs off a little of the gilding, and is surcharged with a sort of secondhand, vapid, tingling, troublesome self-importance. His personal vanity is thus continually flattered and perked up into ridiculous self-complacency, while his imagination is jaded and impaired by daily misuse. Everything is vulgarised in his mind. Nothing dwells long enough on it to produce an interest; nothing is contemplated sufficiently at a distance to excite curiosity or wonder. *Your true Cockney is your only true leveller.* Let him be as low as he will, he fancies he is as good as anybody else. He has no respect for himself, and still less (if possible) for you. He cares little about his own advantages, if he can only make a jest at yours. Every feeling comes to him through a medium of levity and impertinence; nor does he like to have this habit of mind disturbed by being brought into collision with anything serious or respectable. He despairs (in such a crowd of competitors) of distinguishing himself, but laughs heartily at the idea of being able to trip up the heels of other people's pretensions. A Cockney feels no gratitude. This is a first principle with him. He regards any obligation you confer upon him as a species of imposition, a ludicrous assumption of fancied superiority. He talks about everything, for he has heard something about it; and understanding nothing of the matter, concludes he has as good a right as you. He is a politician, for he has seen the Parliament House; he is a critic, because he knows the principal actors by sight; has a taste for music, because he belongs to a glee-club at the West End; and is gallant, in virtue of sometimes frequenting the lobbies at half-price. A mere Londoner, in fact, from the opportunities he has of knowing something of a number of objects (and those striking ones) fancies himself a sort of privileged person; remains satisfied with the assumption of merits, so much the more unquestionable

as they are not his own; and from being dazzled with noise, show, and appearances, is less capable of giving a real opinion, or entering into any subject, than the meanest peasant. There are greater lawyers, orators, painters, philosophers, poets, players in London, than in any other part of the United Kingdom: he is a Londoner, and therefore it would be strange if he did not know more of law, eloquence, art, philosophy, poetry, acting, than anyone without his local advantages, and who is merely from the country. This is a *non sequitur*; and it constantly appears so when put to the test.

A real Cockney is the poorest creature in the world, the most literal, the most mechanical, and yet he too lives in a world of romance—a fairyland of his own. He is a citizen of London; and this abstraction leads his imagination the finest dance in the world. London is the first city on the habitable globe; and therefore he must be superior to everyone who lives out of it. There are more people in London than anywhere else; and though a dwarf in stature, his person swells out and expands into *ideal* importance and borrowed magnitude. He resides in a garret or in a two-pair-of-stairs back room; yet he talks of the magnificence of London, and gives himself airs of consequence upon it, as if all the houses in Portman or in Grosvenor Square were his by right or in reversion. “He is owner of all he surveys.” The Monument, the Tower of London, St. James’s Palace, the Mansion House, Whitehall, are part and parcel of his being. Let us suppose him to be a lawyer’s clerk at half-a-guinea a week; but he knows the Inns of Court, the Temple Gardens, and Gray’s-Inn Passage—sees the lawyers in their wigs walking up and down Chancery Lane, and has advanced within half-a-dozen yards of the Chancellor’s chair:—who can doubt that he understands (by implication) every point of law (however intricate) better than the most expert country practitioner? He is a shopman, and

nailed all day behind the counter : but he sees hundreds and thousands of gay, well-dressed people pass—an endless phantasmagoria—and enjoys their liberty and gaudy flattering pride. He is a footman—but he rides behind beauty, through a crowd of carriages, and visits a thousand shops. Is he a tailor—that last infirmity of human nature? The stigma on his profession is lost in the elegance of the patterns he provides, and of the persons he adorns ; and he is something very different from a mere country butcher. Nay, the very scavenger and nightman thinks the dirt in the street has something precious in it, and his employment is solemn, silent, sacred, peculiar to London ! A *barker* in Monmouth Street, a slopseller in Ratcliffe Highway, a tapster at a night-cellar, a beggar in St. Giles's, a drab in Fleet Ditch, live in the eyes of millions, and eke out a dreary, wretched, scanty, or loathsome existence from the gorgeous, busy, glowing scene around them. It is a common saying among such persons that “they had rather be hanged in London than die a natural death out of it anywhere else” —such is the force of habit and imagination. Even the eye of childhood is dazzled and delighted with the polished splendour of the jewellers' shops, the neatness of the turnery-ware, the festoons of artificial flowers, the confectionery, the chemists' shops, the lamps, the horses, the carriages, the sedan-chairs : to this was formerly added a set of traditional associations—Whittington and his Cat, Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Treason, the Fire and the Plague of London, and the heads of the Scotch rebels that were stuck on Temple Bar in 1745. These have vanished, and in their stead the curious and romantic eye must be content to pore in Pennant¹ for the site of old London Wall, or to peruse the sentimental milestone

¹ Pennant's *Account of London*, of which there were several editions, was formerly in esteem as the best modern and popular description of the metropolis. It has long been superseded.—Ed.

that marks the distance to the place "where Hickeys's Hall¹ formerly stood!"

The Cockney lives in a go-cart of local prejudices and positive illusions; and when he is turned out of it, he hardly knows how to stand or move. He ventures through Hyde Park Corner, as a cat crosses a gutter. The trees pass by the coach very oddly. The country has a strange blank appearance. It is not lined with houses all the way, like London. He comes to places he never saw or heard of. He finds the world is bigger than he thought for. He might have dropped from the moon for anything he knows of the matter. He is mightily disposed to laugh, but is half afraid of making some blunder. Between sheepishness and conceit, he is in a very ludicrous situation. He finds that the people walk on two legs, and wonders to hear them talk a dialect so different from his own. He perceives London fashions have got down into the country before him, and that some of the better sort are dressed as well as he is. A drove of pigs or cattle stopping the road is a very troublesome interruption. A crow in a field, a magpie in a hedge, are to him very odd animals—he can't tell what to make of them, or how they live. He does not altogether like the accommodation at the inns—it is not what he has been used to in town. He begins to be communicative—says he was "born within the sound of Bow-bell," and attempts some jokes, at which no one laughs. He asks the coachman a question, to which he receives no answer. All this is to him very unaccountable and unexpected. He arrives at his journey's end; and instead of being the great man he anticipated among his friends and country relations, finds that they are barely civil to him, or make a butt of him; have topics of their own which he is as completely ignorant of as they are indifferent to what he says, so that he is glad to get back to London again, where he meets with his favourite

¹ Built by Sir Baptist Hicks, first Viscount Campden.—ED.

indulgences and associates, and fancies the whole world is occupied with what he hears and sees.

A Cockney loves a tea-garden in summer as he loves the play or the Cider-Cellar in winter—where he sweetens the air with the fumes of tobacco, and makes it echo to the sound of his own voice. This kind of suburban retreat is a relief to the close and confined air of a City life. The imagination, long pent-up behind a counter or between brick walls, with noisome smells and dingy objects, cannot bear at once to launch into the boundless expanse of the country, but “shorter excursions tries,” coveting something between the two, and finding it at White Conduit House,¹ or the Rosemary Branch,² or Bagnigge Wells. The landlady is seen at a bow-window in near perspective, with punchbowls and lemons disposed orderly around—the lime-trees or poplars wave overhead to “catch the breezy air,” through which, typical of the huge dense cloud that hangs over the metropolis, curls up the thin, blue, odoriferous vapour of virginia and oronoko—the benches are ranged in rows, the fields and hedgerows spread out their verdure; Hampstead and Highgate are seen in the background, and contain the imagination within gentle limits—here the holiday people are playing ball; here they are playing bowls—here they are quaffing ale, there sipping tea—here the loud wager is heard, there the political debate. In a sequestered nook a slender youth with purple face and drooping head, nodding over a glass of gin toddy, breathes in tender accents—“There’s nought so sweet on earth as Love’s young dream;” while “Rosy Ann” takes its turn, and “Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled” is thundered forth in accents that might wake the dead. In another part sit carpers and critics, who dispute

¹ At Islington; see a description of it in Brayley’s *Londiniana*, ii. 195.—ED.

² There were several *Rosemary Branches* of old—one at Camberwell. See *History of Sign-boards*, 1867, p. 238.—ED.

the score of the reckoning or the game, or cavil at the taste and execution of the *would-be* Brahams and Durusets. Of this latter class was Dr. Goodman, a man of other times—I mean of those of Smollett and Defoe—who was curious in opinion, obstinate in the wrong, great in little things, and inveterate in petty warfare. I vow he held me an argument once “an hour by St. Dunstan’s clock,” while I held an umbrella over his head (the friendly protection of which he was unwilling to quit to walk in the rain to Camberwell) to prove to me that Richard Pinch was neither a fives-player nor a pleasing singer. “Sir,” said he, “I deny that Mr. Pinch plays the game. He is a cunning player, but not a good one. I grant his tricks, his little mean dirty ways, but he is not a manly antagonist. He has no hit, and no left hand. How, then, can he set up for a superior player? And then as to his always striking the ball against the side-wings at Copenhagen House, Cavanagh, sir, used to say, ‘The wall was made to hit at!’ I have no patience with such pitiful shifts and advantages. They are an insult upon so fine and athletic a game! And as to his setting up for a singer, it’s quite ridiculous. You know, Mr. Hazlitt, that to be a really excellent singer, a man must lay claim to one of two things; in the first place, sir, he must have a naturally fine ear for music, or secondly, an early education, exclusively devoted to that study. But no one ever suspected Mr. Pinch of refined sensibility; and his education, as we all know, has been a little at large. Then again, why should he of all others be always singing ‘Rosy Ann,’ and ‘Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,’ till one is sick of hearing them? It’s preposterous, and I mean to tell him so. You know, I’m sure, without my hinting it, that in the first of these admired songs, the sentiment is voluptuous and tender, and in the last patriotic. Now Pinch’s romance never wandered from behind his counter, and his patriotism lies in his breeches-pocket. Sir, the utmost he should aspire

to would be to play upon the Jews' harp !” This story of the Jews' harp tickled some of Pinch's friends, who gave him various hints of it, which nearly drove him mad, till he discovered what it was ; for though no jest or sarcasm ever had the least effect upon him, yet he cannot bear to think that there should be any joke of this kind about him and he not in the secret : it makes against that *knowing* character which he so much affects. Pinch is in one respect a complete specimen of a Cockney. He never has anything to say, and yet is never at a loss for an answer. That is, his pertness keeps exact pace with his dulness. His friend, the Doctor, used to complain of this in good set terms :—“ You can never make anything of Mr. Pinch,” he would say. “ Apply the most cutting remark to him, and his only answer is, ‘ *The same to you, sir.*’ If Shakespear were to rise from the dead to confute him, I firmly believe it would be to no purpose. I assure you, I have found it so. I once thought indeed I had him at a disadvantage, but I was mistaken. You shall hear, sir. I had been reading the following sentiment in a modern play—*The Road to Ruin*, by the late Mr. Holcroft :—‘ For how should the soul of Socrates inhabit the body of a stocking-weaver ?’ This was pat to the point (you know our friend is a hosier and haberdasher) ; I came full with it to keep an appointment I had with Pinch, began a game, quarrelled with him in the middle of it on purpose, went upstairs to dress, and as I was washing my hands in the slop-basin (watching my opportunity) turned coolly round and said, ‘ It's impossible there should be any sympathy between you and me, Mr. Pinch : for as the poet says, ‘ How should the soul of Socrates inhabit the body of a stocking-weaver ?’ ‘ Ay,’ says he, ‘ does the poet say so ? *then the same to you, sir !*’ I was confounded ; I gave up the attempt to conquer him in wit or argument. He would pose the Devil, sir, by his ‘ *The same to you, sir.*’ ” We had another joke against Richard Pinch, to which the

Doctor was not a party, which was, that being asked after the respectability of the Hole in the Wall, at the time that Randall took it, he answered quite unconsciously, "Oh! it's a very genteel place, I go there myself sometimes!" Dr. Goodman was descended by the mother's side from the poet Jago,¹ was a private gentleman in town, and a medical dilettanti in the country, dividing his time equally between business and pleasure; had an inexhaustible flow of words, and an imperturbable vanity, and held "stout notions on the metaphysical score." He maintained the free agency of man, with the spirit of a martyr and the gaiety of a man of wit and pleasure about town—told me he had a curious tract on that subject by A. C. (Anthony Collins) which he carefully locked up in his box, lest any-one should see it but himself, to the detriment of their character and morals, and put it to me whether it was not hard, on the principles of *philosophical necessity*, for a man to come to be hanged? To which I replied, "I thought it hard on any terms!" A knavish *marker*, who had listened to the dispute, laughed at this retort, and seemed to assent to the truth of it, supposing it might one day be his own case.

Mr. Smith and the Brangtons, in *Evelina*, are the finest possible examples of the spirit of Cockneyism. I once knew a linendraper in the City, who owned to me he did not quite like this part of Miss Burney's novel. He said, "I myself lodge in a first floor, where there are young ladies in the house: they sometimes have company, and if I am out, they ask me to lend them the use of my apartment, which I readily do out of politeness, or if it is an agreeable party, I perhaps join them. All this is so like what passes in the novel, that I fancy myself a sort of second Mr. Smith, and am not quite easy at it!" This was mentioned to the fair Authoress, and she was delighted to find that her characters were so true, that an

¹ Richard Jago, a forgotten writer, whose poetical remains may be found in the 17th volume of *Chalmers' Collection*, 1810.—Ed.

actual person fancied himself to be one of them. The resemblance, however, was only in the externals; and the real modesty of the individual stumbled on the likeness to a City coxcomb!

It is curious to what a degree persons brought up in certain occupations in a great city, are shut up from a knowledge of the world, and carry their simplicity to a pitch of unheard-of extravagance. London is the only place in which the child grows completely up into the man. I have known characters of this kind, which, in the way of childish ignorance and self-pleasing delusion, exceeded anything to be met with in Shakespear or Ben Jonson, or the old comedy. For instance, the following may be taken as a true sketch. Imagine a person with a florid shining complexion like a ploughboy, large staring teeth, a merry eye, his hair stuck into the fashion with curling-irons and pomatum, a slender figure, and a decent suit of black—add to which the thoughtlessness of the schoolboy, and the forwardness of the thriving tradesman, and the plenary consciousness of the citizen of London—and you have Mr. Dunster¹ before you, the fishmonger in the Poultry. You shall hear how he chirps over his cups, and exults in his private opinions. “I’ll play no more with you,” I said, “Mr. Dunster—you are five points in the game better than I am.” I had just lost three half-crown rubbers at cribbage to him, which loss of mine he presently thrust into a canvas pouch (not a silk purse) out of which he had produced just before, first a few half-pence, then half a dozen pieces of silver, then a handful of guineas, and lastly, lying *perdu* at the bottom, a fifty-pound bank-note. “I’ll tell you what,” I said, “I should like to play you a game at marbles”—this was at a sort of Christmas party or Twelfth-Night merrymaking.

“Marbles!” said Dunster, catching up the sound, and

¹ His real name was Fisher. See *Memoirs of W. H.* 1867, ii. 310.—Ed.

his eye brightening with childish glee, "What! you mean *ring-taw*?"

"Yes."

"I should beat you at it to a certainty. I was one of the best in our school (it was at Clapham, sir—the Rev. Mr. Denman's, at Clapham, was the place where I was brought up), though there were two others there better than me. They were the best that ever were. I'll tell you, sir, I'll give you an idea. There was a water-butt or cistern, sir, at our school, that turned with a cock. Now suppose that brass ring that the window curtain is fastened to, to be the cock, and that these boys were standing where we are, about twenty feet off—well, sir, I'll tell you what I have seen them do. One of them had a favourite taw (or *alley* as we used to call them); he'd take aim at the cock of the cistern with this marble, as I may do now. Well, sir—will you believe it?—such was his strength of knuckle and certainty of aim, he'd hit it, turn it, let the water out, and then, sir, when the water had run out as much as it was wanted, the other boy (he'd just the same strength of knuckle and certainty of eye) he'd aim at it too, be sure to hit it, turn it round, and stop the water from running out. Yes, what I tell you is very remarkable, but it's true. One of these boys was named Cock, and t'other Butler."

"They might have been named Spigot and Fawcett, my dear sir, from your account of them."

"I should not mind playing you at fives neither, though I'm out of practice. I think I should beat you in a week: I was a real good one at that. A pretty game, sir! I had the finest ball that I suppose ever was seen. Made it myself; I'll tell you how, sir. You see, I put a piece of cork at the bottom, then I wound some fine worsted yarn round it, then I had to bind it round with some fine packthread, and then sew the case on. You'd hardly believe it, but I was the envy of the whole

school for that ball. They all wanted to get it from me, but lord, sir! I would let none of them come near it. I kept it in my waistcoat pocket all day, and at night I used to take it to bed with me and put it under my pillow. I couldn't sleep easy without it."

The same idle vein might be found in the country, but I doubt whether it would find a tongue to give it utterance. Cockneyism is a ground of native shallowness mounted with pertness and conceit. Yet with all this simplicity and extravagance in dilating upon his favourite topics, Dunster is a man of spirit, of attention to business, knows how to make out and get in his bills, and is far from being henpecked. One thing is certain, that such a man must be a true Englishman and a loyal subject. He has a slight tinge of letters, with shame I confess it—has in his possession a volume of the *European Magazine* for the year 1761, and is an humble admirer of *Tristram Shandy* (particularly the story of the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles, which is something in his own endless manner) and of *Gil Blas of Santillane*. Over these (the last thing before he goes to bed at night) he smokes a pipe, and meditates for an hour. After all, what is there in these harmless half-lies, these fantastic exaggerations, but a literal, prosaic, Cockney translation of the admired lines in Gray's *Ode to Eton College* :—

What idle progeny succeed
To chase the rolling circle's speed
Or urge the flying ball?

A man shut up all his life in his shop, without anything to interest him from one year's end to another but the cares and details of business, with scarcely any intercourse with books or opportunities for society, distracted with the buzz and glare and noise about him, turns for relief to the retrospect of his childish years; and there, through the long vista, at one bright loophole, leading

out of the thorny mazes of the world into the clear morning light, he sees the idle fancies and gay amusements of his boyhood dancing like motes in the sunshine. Shall we blame or shall we laugh at him, if his eye glistens, and his tongue grows wanton in their praise?

None but a Scotchman would—that pragmatistical sort of personage, who thinks it a folly ever to have been young, and who, instead of dallying with the frail past, bends his brows upon the future, and looks only to the *main chance*. Forgive me, dear Dunster, if I have drawn a sketch of some of thy venial foibles, and delivered thee into the hands of these Cockneys of the North, who will fall upon thee and devour thee, like so many cannibals, without a grain of salt!

If familiarity in cities breeds contempt, ignorance in the country breeds aversion and dislike. People come too much in contact in town, in other places they live too much apart, to unite cordially and easily. Our feelings, in the former case, are dissipated and exhausted by being called into constant and vain activity; in the latter they rust and grow dead for want of use. If there is an air of levity and indifference in London manners, there is a harshness, a moroseness, and disagreeable restraint in those of the country. We have little disposition to sympathy, when we have few persons to sympathise with: we lose the relish and capacity for social enjoyment, the seldomer we meet. A habit of sullenness, coldness, and misanthropy grows upon us. If we look for hospitality and a cheerful welcome in country places, it must be in those where the arrival of a stranger is an event, the recurrence of which need not be greatly apprehended, or it must be on rare occasions, on “some high festival of once a year.” Then indeed the stream of hospitality, so long dammed up, may flow without stint for a short season; or a stranger may be expected with some sort of eager impatience as a caravan of wild beasts, or any other

natural curiosity, that excites our wonder and fills up the craving of the mind after novelty. By degrees, however, even this last principle loses its effect: books, newspapers, whatever carries us out of ourselves into a world of which we see and know nothing, become distasteful, repulsive; and we turn away with indifference or disgust from everything that disturbs our lethargic animal existence, or takes off our attention from our petty, local interests and pursuits. Man, left long to himself, is no better than a mere clod; or his activity, for want of some other vent, preys upon himself, or is directed to splenetic, peevish dislikes, or vexatious, harassing persecution of others. I once drew a picture of a country life: it was a portrait of a particular place, a caricature if you will, but with certain allowances, I fear it was too like in the individual instance, and that it will hold too generally true.¹

If these, then, are the faults and vices of the inhabitants of town or of the country, where should a man go to live, so as to escape from them? I answer, that in the country we have the society of the groves, the fields, the brooks, and in London a man may keep to himself, or choose his company as he pleases.

It appears to me that there is an amiable mixture of these two opposite characters in a person who chances to have passed his youth in London, and who has retired into the country for the rest of his life. We may find in such a one a social polish, a pastoral simplicity. He rusticates agreeably, and vegetates with a degree of sentiment. He comes to the next post-town to see for letters, watches the coaches as they pass, and eyes the passengers with a look of familiar curiosity, thinking that he, too, was a gay fellow in his time. He turns his horse's head down the narrow lane that leads homewards, puts on an old coat to save his wardrobe, and fills his glass nearer to the brim. As he lifts the purple juice to his lips and to his eye, and in the

¹ See *Round Table*, vol. ii., p. 116.

dim solitude that hems him round, thinks of the glowing line—

This bottle 's the sun of our table—

another sun rises upon his imagination—the sun of his youth, the blaze of vanity, the glitter of the metropolis, “glares round his soul, and mocks his closing eyelids,” the distant roar of coaches is in his ears—the pit stare upon him with a thousand eyes—Mrs. Siddons, Bannister, King, are before him—he starts as from a dream, and swears he will to London; but the expense, the length of way deters him, and he rises the next morning to trace the footsteps of the hare that has brushed the dewdrops from the lawn, or to attend a meeting of Magistrates! Mr. Justice Shallow answered in some sort to this description of a retired Cockney and indigenous country gentleman. He “knew the Inns of Court, where they would talk of mad Shallow yet, and where the *bona robas* were, and had them at commandment: aye, and had heard the chimes at midnight!”

It is a strange state of society (such as that in London) where a man does not know his next-door neighbour, and where the feelings (one would think) must recoil upon themselves, and either fester or become obtuse. Mr. Wordsworth, in the Preface to his poem of the *Excursion*, represents men in cities as so many wild beasts or evil spirits, shut up in cells of ignorance, without natural affections, and barricadoed down in sensuality and selfishness. The nerve of humanity is bound up, according to him—the circulation of the blood stagnates. And it would be so, if men were merely cut off from intercourse with their immediate neighbours, and did not meet together generally and more at large. But man in London becomes as Mr. Burke has it, a sort of “public creature.” He lives in the eye of the world, and the world in his. If he witnesses less of the details of private life, he has better

opportunities of observing its larger masses and varied movements. He sees the stream of human life pouring along the streets—its comforts and embellishments piled up in the shops—the houses are proofs of the industry, the public buildings of the art and magnificence of man; while the public amusements and places of resort are a centre and support for social feeling. A playhouse alone is a school of humanity, where all eyes are fixed on the same gay or solemn scene, where smiles or tears are spread from face to face, and where a thousand hearts beat in unison! Look at the company in a country theatre (in comparison) and see the coldness, the sullenness, the want of sympathy, and the way in which they turn round to scan and scrutinise one another. In London there is a *public*; and each man is part of it. We are gregarious, and affect the kind. We have a sort of abstract existence; and a community of ideas and knowledge (rather than local proximity) is the bond of society and good-fellowship. This is one great cause of the tone of political feeling in large and populous cities. There is here a visible body-politic, a type and image of that huge Leviathan the State. We comprehend that vast denomination, the *People*, of which we see a tenth part daily moving before us; and by having our imaginations emancipated from petty interests and personal dependence, we learn to venerate ourselves as men, and to respect the rights of human nature. Therefore it is that the citizens and free-men of London and Westminster are patriots by prescription, philosophers and politicians by the right of their birthplace. In the country, men are no better than a herd of cattle or scattered deer. They have no idea but of individuals, none of rights or principles—and a king, as the greatest individual, is the highest idea they can form. He is “a species alone,” and as superior to any single peasant as the latter is to the peasant’s dog, or to a crow flying over his head. In London the king is but as one

to a million (numerically speaking), is seldom seen, and then distinguished only from others by the superior graces of his person. A country squire or a lord of the manor is a greater man in his village or hundred!

On the Spirit of Obligations.

THE two rarest things to be met with are good sense and good-nature. For one man who judges right, there are twenty who can say good things; as there are numbers who will serve you or do friendly actions, for one who really wishes you well. It has been said, and often repeated, that "mere good-nature is a fool:" but I think that the dearth of sound sense, for the most part, proceeds from the want of a real, unaffected interest in things, except as they react upon ourselves; or from a neglect of the maxim of that good old philanthropist who said, "*Nihil humani a me alienum puto.*" The narrowness of the heart warps the understanding, and makes us weigh objects in the scales of our self-love, instead of those of truth and justice. We consider not the merits of the case, or what is due to others, but the manner in which our own credit or consequence will be affected; and adapt our opinions and conduct to the last of these rather than to the first. The judgment is seldom wrong where the feelings are right; and they generally are so, provided they are warm and sincere. He who intends others well, is likely to advise them for the best; he who has any cause at heart, seldom ruins it by his imprudence. Those who play the public or their friends slippery tricks, have in secret no objection to betray them.

One finds out the folly and malice of mankind by the impertinence of friends—by their professions of service and tenders of advice—by their fears for your reputation

and anticipation of what the world may say of you ; by which means they suggest objections to your enemies, and at the same time absolve themselves from the task of justifying your errors, by having warned you of the consequences—by the care with which they tell you ill-news, and conceal from you any flattering circumstance—by their dread of your engaging in any creditable attempt, and mortification if you succeed—by the difficulties and hindrances they throw in your way—by their satisfaction when you happen to make a slip or get into a scrape, and their determination to tie your hands behind you, lest you should get out of it—by their panic-terrors at your entering into a vindication of yourself, lest in the course of it, you should call upon them for a certificate to your character—by their lukewarmness in defending, by their readiness in betraying you—by the high standard by which they try you, and to which you can hardly ever come up—by their forwardness to partake your triumphs, by their backwardness to share your disgrace—by their acknowledgment of your errors out of candour, and suppression of your good qualities out of envy—by their not contradicting, or by their joining in the cry against you, lest they, too, should become objects of the same abuse—by their playing the game into your adversaries' hands—by always letting their imaginations take part with their cowardice, their vanity, and selfishness against you ; and thus realising or hastening all the ill consequences they affect to deplore, by spreading abroad that very spirit of distrust, obloquy, and hatred which they predict will be excited against you !

In all these pretended demonstrations of an over-anxiety for our welfare, we may detect a great deal of spite and ill-nature lurking under the disguise of a friendly and officious zeal. It is wonderful how much love of mischief and rankling spleen lies at the bottom of the human heart, and how a constant supply of gall seems as necessary to the health and activity of the mind as of the body.

Yet perhaps it ought not to excite much surprise that this gnawing, morbid, acrimonious temper should produce the effect it does, when, if it does not vent itself on others, it preys upon our own comforts, and makes us see the worst side of everything, even as it regards our own prospects and tranquillity. It is the not being comfortable in ourselves, that makes us seek to render other people uncomfortable. A person of this character will advise you against a prosecution for a libel, and shake his head at your attempting to shield yourself from a shower of calumny. It is not that he is afraid you will be *nonsuited*, but that you will gain a verdict! They caution you against provoking hostility, in order that you may submit to indignity. They say that "if you publish a certain work, it will be your ruin"—hoping that it will, and by their tragical denunciations, bringing about this very event as far as it lies in their power, or at any rate, enjoying a premature triumph over you in the meantime. What I would say to any friend who may be disposed to foretell a general outcry against any work of mine, would be to request him to judge and speak of it for himself, as he thinks it deserves—and not by his overweening scruples and qualms of conscience on my account, to afford those very persons whose hostility he deprecates the cue they are to give to party-prejudice, and which they may justify by his authority.

Suppose you are about to give lectures at a public institution, these friends and well-wishers hope "you'll be turned out—if you preserve your principles, they are sure you will." Is it that your consistency gives them any concern? No, but they are uneasy at your gaining a chance of a little popularity—they do not like this new feather in your cap, they wish to see it struck out, *for the sake of your character*—and when this was once the case, it would be an additional relief to them to see your character following the same road the next day. The

exercise of their bile seems to be the sole employment and gratification of such people. They deal in the miseries of human life. They are always either hearing or foreboding some new grievance. They cannot contain their satisfaction, if you tell them any mortification or cross-accident that has happened to yourself; and if you complain of their want of sympathy, they laugh in your face. This would be unaccountable, but for the spirit of perversity and contradiction implanted in human nature. If things go right, there is nothing to be done—these active-minded persons grow restless, dull, vapid—life is a sleep, a sort of *euthanasia*—Let them go wrong, and all is well again; they are once more on the alert, have something to pester themselves and other people about; may wrangle on, and “make mouths at the invisible event!” Luckily, there is no want of materials for this disposition to work upon, *there is plenty of grist for the mill*. If you fall in love, they tell you (by way of consolation) it is a pity that you do not fall downstairs and fracture a limb—it would be a relief to your mind, and show you your folly. So they would reform the world. The class of persons I speak of are almost uniform grumblers and croakers against governments; and it must be confessed, governments are of great service in fostering their humours. “Born for their use, they live but to oblige them.” While kings are left free to exercise their proper functions, and poet-laureates make out their *Mittimus* to Heaven without a warrant, they will never stop the mouths of the censorious by changing their dispositions; the juices of faction will ferment, and the secretions of the State be duly performed! I do not mind when a character of this sort meets a minister of state like an east wind round a corner, and gives him an ague-fit; but why should he meddle with me? Why should he tell me I write too much, and say that I should gain reputation if I could contrive to starve for a twelvemonth? Or if I

apply to him for a loan of fifty pounds for present necessity, send me word back that he has too much regard for me to comply with my request? It is unhandsome irony. It is not friendly, 'tis not pardonable.¹

I like real good-nature and good-will, better than I do any offers of patronage or plausible rules for my conduct in life. I may suspect the soundness of the last, and I may not be quite sure of the motives of the first. People complain of ingratitude for benefits, and of the neglect of wholesome advice. In the first place, we pay little attention to advice, because we are seldom thought of in it. The person who gives it either contents himself to lay down (*ex cathedrâ*) certain vague, general maxims, and "wise saws," which we knew before; or, instead of considering what we *ought to do*, recommends what he himself *would do*. He merely substitutes his own will, caprice, and prejudices for ours, and expects us to be guided by them. Instead of changing places with us (to see what is best to be done in the given circumstances), he insists on our looking at the question from his point of view, and acting in such a manner as to please him. This is not at all reasonable; for *one man's meat*, according to the old adage, *is another man's poison*. And it is not strange, that starting from such opposite premises, we should seldom jump in a conclusion, and that the art of giving and taking advice is little better than a game at cross-purposes. I have observed that those who are the most inclined to assist others are the least forward or peremptory with their advice; for having our interest really at heart, they consider what can, rather than what *cannot* be done, and aid our views and endeavour to avert ill-consequences by moderating our impatience and allaying irritations, instead of thwarting our main design, which only tends to make us more extravagant and violent than

¹ This circumstance did not happen to me, but to an acquaintance.

ever. In the second place, benefits are often conferred out of ostentation or pride, rather than from true regard ; and the person obliged is too apt to perceive this. People who are fond of appearing in the light of patrons will perhaps go through fire and water to serve you, who yet would be sorry to find you no longer wanted their assistance, and whose friendship cools and their good-will slackens, as you are relieved by their active zeal from the necessity of being further beholden to it. Compassion and generosity are their favourite virtues ; and they countenance you, as you afford them opportunities for exercising them. The instant you can go alone, or can stand upon your own ground, you are discarded as unfit for their purpose.

This is something more than mere good-nature or humanity. A thoroughly good-natured man, a real friend, is one who is pleased at our good-fortune, as well as prompt to seize every occasion of relieving our distress. We apportion our gratitude accordingly. We are thankful for good-will rather than for services, for the motive than the *quantum* of favour received—a kind word or look is never forgotten, while we cancel prouder and weightier obligations ; and those who esteem us or evince a partiality to us are those whom we still consider as our best friends. Nay, so strong is this feeling, that we extend it even to those counterfeits in friendship—flatterers and sycophants. Our self-love, rather than our self-interest, is the master-key to our affections.

I am not convinced that those are always the best-natured or the best-conditioned men, who busy themselves most with the distresses of their fellow-creatures. I do not know that those whose names stand at the head of all subscriptions to charitable institutions, and who are perpetual stewards of dinners and meetings to encourage and promote the establishment of asylums for the relief of the blind, the halt, and the orphan poor, are persons gifted

with the best tempers or the kindest feelings. I do not dispute their virtue, I doubt their sensibility. I am not here speaking of those who make a trade of the profession of humanity, or set their names down out of mere idle parade and vanity. I mean those who really enter into the details and drudgery of this sort of service, *con amore*, and who delight in surveying and in diminishing the amount of human misery. I conceive it possible, that a person who is going to pour oil and balm into the wounds of afflicted humanity, at a meeting of the Western Dispensary, by handsome speeches and by a handsome donation (not grudgingly given), may be thrown into a fit of rage that very morning by having his toast too much buttered, may quarrel with the innocent prattle and amusements of his children, cry "Pish!" at every observation his wife utters, and scarcely feel a moment's comfort at any period of his life, except when he hears or reads of some case of pressing distress that calls for his immediate interference, and draws off his attention from his own situation and feelings by the act of alleviating it. Those martyrs to the cause of humanity, in short, who run the gauntlet of the whole catalogue of unheard-of crimes and afflicting casualties, who ransack prisons, and plunge into lazarettos and slave-ships as their daily amusement and highest luxury, must generally, I think (though not always), be prompted to the arduous task by uneasy feelings of their own, and supported through it by iron nerves. Their fortitude must be equal to their pity. I do not think Mr. Wilberforce a case in point in this argument. He is evidently a delicately-framed, nervous, sensitive man. I should suppose him to be a kind and affectionately-disposed person in all the relations of life. His weakness is too quick a sense of reputation, a desire to have the good word of all men, a tendency to truckle to power and fawn on opinion. But there are some of these philanthropists that a physiognomist has hard work

to believe in. They seem made of pasteboard, they look like mere machines : their benevolence may be said to go on rollers, and they are screwed to the sticking-place by the wheels and pulleys of humanity :

If to their share some splendid virtues fall,
Look in their face, and you forget them all.

They appear so much the creatures of the head and so little of the heart, they are so cold, so lifeless, so mechanical, so much governed by calculation, and so little by impulse, that it seems the toss-up of a halfpenny, a mere turn of a feather, whether such people should become a Granville Sharp, or a Hubert in *King John*, a Howard, or a Sir Hudson Lowe !

“Charity covers a multitude of sins.” Wherever it is, there nothing can be wanting ; wherever it is not, all else is vain. “The meanest peasant on the bleakest mountain is not without a portion of it (says Sterne) ; he finds the lacerated lamb of another’s flock,” &c.¹ I do not think education or circumstances can ever entirely eradicate this principle. Some professions may be supposed to blunt it, but it is perhaps more in appearance than in reality. Butchers are not allowed to sit on a jury for life and death ; but probably this is a prejudice : if they have the *destructive organ* in an unusual degree of expansion, they vent their sanguinary inclinations on the brute creation ; and besides, they look too jolly, rosy, and in good case (they and their wives), to harbour much cruelty in their dispositions. Neither would I swear that a man was humane merely for abstaining from animal food. A tiger would not be a lamb, though it fed on milk. Surgeons are in general thought to be unfeeling, and steeled by custom to the sufferings of humanity. They may be so, as far as relates to broken bones and bruises, but not to other things. Nor are they necessarily so in

¹ See the passage in the *Sentimental Journey*.

their profession; for we find different degrees of callous insensibility in different individuals. Some practitioners have an evident delight in alarming the apprehensions and cutting off the limbs of their patients: these would have been ill-natured men in any situation in life, and merely make an excuse of their profession to indulge their natural ill-humour and brutality of temper. A surgeon who is fond of giving pain to those who consult him will not spare the feelings of his neighbours in other respects; has a tendency to probe other wounds besides those of the body; and is altogether a harsh and disagreeable character. A Jack-Ketch may be known to tie the fatal noose with trembling fingers; or a jailor may have a heart softer than the walls of his prison. There have been instances of highwaymen who were proverbially gentlemen. I have seen a Bow-street officer¹ (not but that the transition is ungracious and unjust) reading *Racine*, and following the recitation of *Talma* at the door of a room which he was sent to guard. Police-magistrates, from the scenes they have to witness and the characters they come in contact with, may be supposed to lose the fine edge of delicacy and sensibility: yet they are not all alike, but differ, as one star differs from another in magnitude. One is as remarkable for mildness and lenity as another is notorious for harshness and severity. The late Mr. Justice Fielding was a member of this profession, which (however little accordant with his own feelings) he made pleasant to those of others. He generally sent away the disputants in that unruly region, where he presided, tolerably satisfied. I have often seen him, escaped from the noisy repulsive scene, sunning himself in the adjoining walks of St. James's Park, and with mild aspect, and lofty but unwieldy mien, eyeing the verdant glades and lengthening vistas where perhaps his childhood loitered. He had a strong resemblance to his father,

¹ Lavender.

the immortal Author of *Tom Jones*. I never passed him that I did not take off my hat to him in spirit. I could not help thinking of Parson Adams, of Booth and Amelia. I seemed to belong by intellectual adoption to the same family, and would willingly have acknowledged my obligations to the father to the son. He had something of the air of Colonel Bath. When young, he had very excellent prospects in the law, but neglected a brief sent him by the Attorney-General, in order to attend a glee-club, for which he had engaged to furnish a rondeau. This spoiled his fortune. A man whose object is to please himself, or to keep his word to his friends, is the last man to thrive at court. Yet he looked serene and smiling to his latest breath, conscious of the goodness of his own heart, and of not having sullied a name that had thrown a light upon humanity!

There are different modes of obligation, and different avenues to our gratitude and favour. A man may lend his countenance who will not part with his money, and open his mind to us who will not draw out his purse. How many ways are there, in which our peace may be assailed, besides actual want! How many comforts do we stand in need of, besides meat and drink and clothing! Is it nothing to "administer to a mind diseased"—to heal a wounded spirit? After all other difficulties are removed, we still want some one to bear with our infirmities, to impart our confidence to, to encourage us in our *hobbies* (nay, to get up and ride behind us), and to like us with all our faults. True friendship is self-love at second-hand; where, as in a flattering mirror, we may see our virtues magnified and our errors softened, and where we may fancy our opinion of ourselves confirmed by an impartial and faithful witness. He (of all the world) creeps closest to our bosoms, into our favour and esteem, who thinks of us most nearly as we do of ourselves. Such a one is indeed the pattern of a friend, another self—and

our gratitude for the blessing is as sincere, as it is hollow in most other cases! This is one reason why entire friendship is scarcely to be found except in love. There is a hardness and severity in our judgments of one another; the spirit of competition also intervenes, unless where there is too great an inequality of pretension or difference of taste to admit of mutual sympathy and respect; but a woman's vanity is interested in making the object of her choice the god of her idolatry; and in the intercourse with that sex, there is the finest balance and reflection of opposite and answering excellences imaginable! It is in the highest spirit of the religion of love in the female breast, that Lord Byron has put that beautiful apostrophe in the mouth of Anah, in speaking of her angel-lover (alas! are not the sons of men, too, when they are deified in the hearts of women, only "a little lower than the angels?")—

And when I think that his immortal wings
Shall one day hover o'er the sepulchre
Of the poor child of clay that so adored him,
As he adored the Highest, death becomes
Less terrible!

This is a dangerous string, which I ought never to touch upon; but the shattered cords vibrate of themselves!

The difference of age, of situation in life, and an absence of all considerations of business have, I apprehend, something of the same effect in producing a refined and abstracted friendship. The person whose doors I enter with most pleasure, and quit with most regret, never did me the smallest favour. I once did him an uncalled-for service, and we nearly quarrelled about it. If I were in the utmost distress, I should just as soon think of asking his assistance, as of stopping a person on the highway. Practical benevolence is not his *forte*. He leaves the profession of that to others. His habits, his theory are against it as idle and vulgar. His hand is

closed, but what of that? His eye is ever open, and reflects the universe: his silver accents, beautiful, venerable as his silver hairs, but not scanty, flow as a river. I never ate or drank in his house; nor do I know or care how the flies or spiders fare in it, or whether a mouse can get a living. But I know that I can get there what I get nowhere else—a welcome, as if one was expected to drop in just at that moment, a total absence of all respect of persons and of airs of self-consequence, endless topics of discourse, refined thoughts, made more striking by ease and simplicity of manner—the husk, the shell of humanity is left at the door, and the spirit mellowed by time, resides within! All you have to do is to sit and listen; and it is like hearing one of Titian's faces speak. To think of worldly matters is a profanation, like that of the money-changers in the Temple; or it is to regard the bread and wine of the Sacrament with carnal eyes. We enter the enchanter's cell, and converse with the divine inhabitant. To have this privilege always at hand, and to be circled by that spell whenever we choose, with an "*Enter Sessami*," is better than sitting at the lower end of the tables of the great, than eating awkwardly from gold plate, than drinking fulsome toasts, or being thankful for gross favours, and gross insults!

Few things tend more to alienate friendship than a want of punctuality in our engagements. I have known the breach of a promise to dine or sup to break up more than one intimacy. A disappointment of this kind rankles in the mind—it cuts up our pleasures (those rare events in human life, which ought not to be wantonly sported with!)—it not only deprives us of the expected gratification, but renders us unfit for, and out of humour with, every other; it makes us think our society not worth having, which is not the way to make us delighted with our own thoughts; it lessens our self-esteem and destroys our confidence in others; and having leisure on our hands

(by being thus left alone) and sufficient provocation withal, we employ it in ripping up the faults of the acquaintance who has played us this slippery trick, and in forming resolutions to pick a quarrel with him the very first opportunity we can find. I myself once declined an invitation to meet Talma, who was an admirer of Shakespear, and who idolized Buonaparte, to keep an appointment with a person who had *forgot* it! One great art of women, who pretend to manage their husbands and keep them to themselves, is to contrive some excuse for breaking their engagements with friends for whom they entertain any respect, or who are likely to have any influence over them.

There is, however, a class of persons who have a particular satisfaction in falsifying your expectations of pleasure in their society, who make appointments for no other ostensible purpose than *not to keep them*; who think their ill-behaviour gives them an air of superiority over you, instead of placing them at your mercy; and who, in fact, in all their overtures of condescending kindness towards you, treat you exactly as if there was no such person in the world. Friendship is with them a *monodrama*, in which they play the principal and sole part. They must needs be very imposing or amusing characters to surround themselves with a circle of friends, who find that they are to be mere cyphers. The egotism would in such instances be offensive and intolerable, if its very excess did not render it entertaining. Some individuals carry this hard, unprincipled, reckless unconsciousness of everything but themselves and their own purposes to such a pitch, that they may be compared to *automata*, whom you never expect to consult your feelings or alter their movements out of complaisance to others. They are wound-up to a certain point, by an internal machinery which you do not very well comprehend; but if they perform their accustomed evolutions so as to excite your wonder or laughter,

it is all very well, you do not quarrel with them, but look on at the *pantomime* of friendship while it lasts or is agreeable.

There are (I may add here) a happy few, whose manner is so engaging and delightful, that, injure you how they will, they cannot offend you. They rob, ruin, ridicule you, and you cannot find in your heart to say a word against them. The late Mr. Sheridan was a man of this kind. He *could not* make enemies. If anyone came to request the repayment of a loan from him, he borrowed more. A cordial shake of his hand was a receipt in full for all demands. He could "coin his *smile* for drachmas," cancelled bonds with *bon mots*, and gave jokes in discharge of a bill. A friend of his said, "If I pull off my hat to him in the street, it costs me fifty pounds, and if he speaks to me, it's a hundred!"

Only one other reflection occurs to me on this subject. I used to think better of the world than I do. I thought its great fault, its original sin, was barbarous ignorance and want, which would be cured by the diffusion of civilisation and letters. But I find (or fancy I do) that as selfishness is the vice of unlettered periods and nations, envy is the bane of more refined and intellectual ones. Vanity springs out of the grave of sordid self-interest. Men were formerly ready to cut one another's throats about the gross means of subsistence, and now they are ready to do it about reputation. The worst is, you are no better off if you fail than if you succeed. You are despised if you do not excel others, and hated if you do. Abuse or praise equally weans your friends from you. We cannot bear eminence in our own department or pursuit, and think it an impertinence in any other. Instead of being delighted with the proofs of excellence and the admiration paid to it, we are mortified with it, thrive only by the defeat of others, and live on the carcase of mangled reputation. By being tried by an *ideal* standard of vanity and affectation,

real objects and common people become odious or insipid. Instead of being raised, all is prostituted, degraded, vile. Everything is reduced to this feverish, importunate, harassing state. I'm heartily sick of it, and I'm sure I have reason if anyone has.

On the Old Age of Artists.

MR. NOLLEKENS died the other day at the age of eighty, and left 240,000*l.* behind him, and the name of one of our best English sculptors. There was a great scramble among the legatees, a codicil to a will with large bequests unsigned, and that last triumph of the dead or dying over those who survive—hopes raised and defeated without a possibility of retaliation, or the smallest use in complaint. The King was at first said to be left residuary legatee. This would have been a fine instance of romantic and gratuitous homage to Majesty, in a man who all his lifetime could never be made to comprehend the abstract idea of the distinction of ranks or even of persons. He would go up to the Duke of York, or Prince of Wales (in spite of warning), take them familiarly by the button like common acquaintance, ask them *how their father did* ; and express pleasure at hearing he was well, saying, “when he was gone, we should never get such another.” He once, when the old King was sitting to him for his bust, fairly stuck a pair of compasses into his nose to measure the distance from the upper lip to the forehead, as if he had been measuring a block of marble. His late Majesty laughed heartily at this, and was amused to find that there was a person in the world ignorant of that vast interval which separated him from every other man. Nollekens, with all his loyalty, merely liked the man, and cared nothing about the King (which was one of those *mixed*

modes, as Mr. Locke calls them, of which he had no more idea than if he had been one of the cream-coloured horses)—handled him like so much common clay, and had no other notion of the matter, but that it was his business to make the best bust of him he possibly could, and to set about it in the regular way. There was something in this plainness and simplicity that savoured perhaps of the hardness and dryness of his art, and of his own peculiar severity of manner. He conceived that one man's head differed from another's only as it was a better or worse subject for modelling; that a bad bust was not made into a good one by being stuck upon a pedestal, or by any painting or varnishing; and that by whatever name he was called, "*a man's a man for a' that.*" A sculptor's ideas must, I should guess, be somewhat rigid and inflexible, like the materials in which he works. Besides, Nollekens's style was comparatively hard and edgy. He had as much truth and character, but none of the polished graces or transparent softness of Chantry. He had more of the rough, plain, downright honesty of his art. It seemed to be his character. Mr. Northcote was once complimenting him on his acknowledged superiority—"Ay, *you* made the best busts of anybody!" "I don't know about that," said the other, his eyes (though their orbs were quenched) smiling with a gleam of smothered delight—"I only know I always tried to make them as like as I could!"

I saw this eminent and singular person one morning in Mr. Northcote's painting room.¹ He had then been for some time blind, and had been obliged to lay aside the exercise of his profession; but he still took a pleasure in designing groups, and in giving directions to others for executing them. He and Northcote made a remarkable pair. He sat down on a low stool (from being rather fatigued), rested with both hands on a stick, as if he

¹ In Argyll Street, Regent Street.—Ed.

clung to the solid and tangible, had an habitual twitch in his limbs and motions, as if catching himself in the act of going too far in chiselling a lip or a dimple in a chin; was *bolt-upright*, with features hard and square, but finely cut, a hooked nose, thin lips, an indented forehead; and the defect in his sight completed his resemblance to one of his own masterly busts. He seemed, by time and labour, to “have *wrought* himself to stone.” Northcote stood by his side—all air and spirit, stooping down to speak to him. The painter was in a loose morning-gown, with his back to the light; his face was like a pale fine piece of colouring; and his eye came out and glanced through the twilight of the past, like an old eagle looking from its eyrie in the clouds. In a moment they had lighted from the top of Mount Cenis in the Vatican—

As when a vulture on Imaus bred
Flies tow’rds the springs
Of Ganges and Hydaspes, Indian streams,

these two fine old men lighted with winged thoughts on the banks of the Tiber, and there bathed and drank of the spirit of their youth. They talked of Titian and Bernini; and Northcote mentioned, that when Roubilliac came back from Rome, after seeing the works of the latter, and went to look at his own in Westminster Abbey, he said—“By G—d, they looked like tobacco-pipes!”

They then recalled a number of anecdotes of Day (a fellow-student of theirs), of Barry and Fuseli. Sir Joshua, and Burke, and Johnson were talked of. The names of these great sons of memory were in the room, and they almost seemed to answer to them—Genius and Fame flung a spell into the air,

And by the force of blear illusion,
Had drawn me on to my confusion,

had I not been long ere this *siren-proof*! It is delightful, though painful, to hear two veterans in art

thus talking over the adventures and studies of their youth, when one feels that they are not quite mortal, that they have one imperishable part about them, and that they are conscious, as they approach the farthest verge of humanity in friendly intercourse and tranquil decay, that they have done something that will live after them. The consolations of religion apart, this is perhaps the only salve that takes out the sting of that sore evil, Death; and by lessening the impatience and alarm at his approach often tempts him to prolong the term of his delay.

It has been remarked that artists, or at least Academicians, live long. It is but a short while ago that Northcote, Nollekens, West, Flaxman, Cosway, and Fuseli were all living at the same time, in good health and spirits, without any diminution of faculties, all of them having long passed their grand climacteric, and attained to the highest reputation in their several departments. From these striking examples, the diploma of a Royal Academician seems to be a grant of a longer lease of life, among its other advantages. In fact, it is tantamount to the conferring a certain reputation in his profession and a competence on any man, and thus supplies the wants of the body and sets his mind at ease. Artists in general, (poor devils!) I am afraid, are not a long-lived race. They break up commonly about forty, their spirits giving way with the disappointment of their hopes of excellence, or the want of encouragement for that which they have attained—their plans disconcerted, and their affairs irretrievable; and in this state of mortification and embarrassment (more or less prolonged and aggravated) they are either starved, or else drink themselves to death. But your Academician is quite a different sort of person. He “bears a charmed life, that must not yield” to duns, or critics, or patrons. He is free of Parnassus, and claims all the immunities of fame in his lifetime. He has but to paint (as the sun has but to shine), to baffle

envious maligners. He has but to send his pictures to the Exhibition of Somerset House, in order to have them hung up: he has but to dine once a year with the Academy, the Nobility, the Cabinet Minister, and the Members of the Royal Family, in order not to want a dinner all the rest of the year. Shall hunger come near the man that has feasted with princes—shall a bailiff tap the shoulder on which a Marquis has familiarly leaned, that has been dubbed with knighthood? No, even the fell Serjeant Death stands as it were aloof, and he enjoys a kind of premature immortality in recorded honours and endless labours. Oh! what golden hours are his! In the short days of winter he husbands time; the long evenings of summer still find him employed! He paints on, and takes no thought for to-morrow. All is right in that respect. His bills are regularly paid, his drafts are duly honoured. He has exercise for his body, employment for his mind in his profession, and without ever stirring out of his painting-room. He studies as much of other things as he pleases. He goes into the best company, or talks with his sitters—attends at the Academy Meetings, and enters into their intrigues and cabals, or stays at home, and enjoys the *otium cum dignitate*. If he is fond of reputation, Fame watches him at work, and weaves a woof, like Iris, over his head—if he is fond of money, Plutus digs a mine under his feet. Whatever he touches becomes gold. He is paid half-price before he begins; and commissions pour in upon commissions. His portraits are like, and his historical pieces fine; for to question the talents or success of a Royal Academician is to betray your own want of taste. Or if his pictures are not quite approved, he is an agreeable man, and converses well. Or he is a person of elegant accomplishments, dresses well, and is an ornament to a private circle. A man is not an Academician for nothing. “His life spins round on its soft axle;” and in a round of satisfied desires and pleasing

avocations, without any of the *wear and tear* of thought or business, there seems no reason why it should not run smoothly on to its last sand !

Of all the Academicians, the Painters, or persons I have ever known, Mr. Northcote is the most to my taste. It may be said of him truly,

Age cannot wither, nor custom stale
His infinite variety.

Indeed, it is not possible he should become tedious, since, even if he repeats the same thing, it appears quite new from his manner that breathes new life into it, and from his eye that is as fresh as the morning. How you hate anyone who tells the same story or anticipates a remark of his—it seems so coarse and vulgar, so dry and inanimate ! There is something like injustice in this preference—but no ! it is a tribute to the spirit that is in the man. Mr. Northcote's manner is completely *extempore*. It is just the reverse of Mr. Canning's oratory. All his thoughts come upon him unawares, and for this reason they surprise and delight you, because they have evidently the same effect upon his mind. There is the same unconsciousness in his conversation that has been pointed out in Shakespear's dialogues ; or you are startled with one observation after another, as when the mist gradually withdraws from a landscape and unfolds objects one by one. His figure is small, shadowy, emaciated ; but you think only of his face, which is fine and expressive. His body is out of the question. It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of the *naïveté*, and unaffected but delightful ease of the way in which he goes on—now touching upon a picture—now looking for his snuffbox—now alluding to some book he has been reading—now returning to his favourite art. He seems just as if he was by himself or in the company of his own thoughts, and makes you feel quite at home. If it is a Member of

Parliament, or a beautiful woman, or a child, or a young artist that drops in, it makes no difference; he enters into conversation with them in the same unconstrained manner, as if they were inmates in his family. Sometimes you find him sitting on the floor, like a schoolboy at play, turning over a set of old prints; and I was pleased to hear him say the other day, coming to one of some men putting off in a boat from a shipwreck—“*That* is the grandest and most original thing I ever did!” This was not egotism, but had all the beauty of truth and sincerity. The print was indeed a noble and spirited design. The circumstance from which it was taken happened to Captain Englefield and his crew. He told Northcote the story, sat for his own head, and brought the men from Wapping to sit for theirs; and these he had arranged into a formal composition, till one Jeffrey, a conceited but clever artist of that day, called in upon him, and said, “Oh! that commonplace thing will never do, it is like West; you should throw them into an action something like this.”—Accordingly, the head of the boat was reared up like a sea-horse riding the waves, and the elements put into commotion, and when the painter looked at it the last thing as he went out of his room in the dusk of the evening, he said that “it frightened him.” He retained the expression in the faces of the men nearly as they sat to him. It is very fine, and truly English; and being natural, it was easily made into history. There is a portrait of a young gentleman striving to get into the boat, while the crew are pushing him off with their oars; but at last he prevailed with them by his perseverance and entreaties to take him in. They had only time to throw a bag of biscuits into the boat before the ship went down; which they divided into a biscuit a day for each man, dipping them into water which they collected by holding up their handkerchiefs in the rain and squeezing it into a bottle. They were out sixteen days in the

Atlantic, and got ashore at some place in Spain, where the great difficulty was to prevent them from eating too much at once, so as to recover gradually. Captain Englefield observed that he suffered more afterwards than at the time—that he had horrid dreams of falling down precipices for a long while after—that in the boat they told merry stories, and kept up one another's spirits as well as they could, and on some complaint being made of their distressed situation, the young gentleman who had been admitted into their crew remarked, "Nay, we are not so badly off neither, we are not come to *eating* one another yet!"—Thus, whatever is the subject of discourse, the scene is revived in his mind, and every circumstance brought before you without affectation or effort, just as it happened. It might be called *picture-talking*. He has always some pat allusion or anecdote. A young engraver came into his room the other day, with a print which he had put into the crown of his hat in order not to crumple it, and he said it had been nearly blown away several times in passing along the street. "You put me in mind," said Northcote, "of a birdcatcher at Plymouth, who used to put the birds he had caught into his hat to bring them home, and one day meeting my father in the road, he pulled off his hat to make him a low bow, and all the birds flew away!" Sometimes Mr. Northcote gets to the top of a ladder to paint a palm-tree or to finish a sky in one of his pictures; and in this situation he listens very attentively to anything you tell him. I was once mentioning some strange inconsistencies of our modern poets; and on coming to one that exceeded the rest, he descended the steps of the ladder one by one, laid his pallet and brushes deliberately on the ground, and coming up to me, said—"You don't say so, it's the very thing I should have supposed of them: yet these are the men that speak against Pope and Dryden." Never any sarcasms were so fine, so cutting, so careless as his. The grossest things from his

lips seem an essence of refinement: the most refined became more so than ever. Hear him talk of Pope's *Epistle to Jervas*, and repeat the lines—

Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on every face ;
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul,
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,^s
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die :
Alas ! how little from the grave we claim ;
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name.

Or let him speak of Boccaccio and his story of Isabella and her pot of basil, in which she kept her lover's head and watered it with her tears, "and how it grew, and it grew, and it grew," and you see his own eyes glisten, and the leaves of the basil-tree tremble to his faltering accents !

Mr. Fuseli's conversation is more striking and extravagant, but less pleasing and natural than Mr. Northcote's. He deals in paradoxes and caricatures. He talks allegories and personifications as he paints them. You are sensible of effort without any repose—no careless pleasantry—no traits of character or touches from nature—everything is laboured or overdone. His ideas are gnarled, hard, and distorted, like his features—his theories stalking and straddle-legged, like his gait—his projects aspiring and gigantic, like his gestures—his performance uncouth and dwarfish, like his person. His pictures are also like himself, with eye-balls of stone stuck in rims of tin, and muscles twisted together like ropes or wires. Yet Fuseli is undoubtedly a man of genius, and capable of the most wild and grotesque combinations of fancy. It is a pity that he ever applied himself to painting, which must always be reduced to the test of the senses. He is a little like Dante or Ariosto, perhaps ; but no more like Michael Angelo, Raphael, or Correggio, than I am. Nature, he

complains, puts him out. Yet he can laugh at artists who "paint ladies with iron lapdogs;" and he describes the great masters of old in words or lines full of truth, and glancing from a pen or tongue of fire. I conceive any person would be more struck with Mr. Fuseli at first sight, but would wish to visit Mr. Northcote oftener. There is a bold and startling outline in his style of talking, but not the delicate finishing or bland tone that there is in that of the latter. Whatever there is harsh or repulsive about him is, however, in a great degree carried off by his animated foreign accent and broken English, which give character where there is none, and soften its asperities where it is too abrupt and violent.

Compared to either of these artists, West (the late President of the Royal Academy) was a thoroughly mechanical and *commonplace* person—a man "of no mark or likelihood." He, too, was small, thin, but with regular, well-formed features, and a precise, sedate, self-satisfied air. This in part arose from the conviction in his own mind that he was the greatest painter (and consequently the greatest man) in the world: kings and nobles were common everyday folks, but there was but one West in the many-peopled globe. If there was any one individual with whom he was inclined to share the palm of undivided superiority, it was with Buonaparte. When Mr. West had painted a picture, he thought it was perfect. He had no idea of anything in the art but rules, and these he exactly conformed to; so that, according to his theory, what he did was quite right. He conceived of painting as a mechanical or scientific process, and had no more doubt of a face or a group in one of his high ideal compositions being what it ought to be, than a carpenter has that he has drawn a line straight with a ruler and a piece of chalk, or than a mathematician has that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones.

When Mr. West walked through his gallery, the result

of fifty years' labour, he saw nothing, either on the right or the left, to be added or taken away. The account he gave of his own pictures, which might seem like ostentation or rhodomontade, had a sincere and infantine simplicity in it. When some one spoke of his "St. Paul shaking off the serpent from his arm" (at Greenwich Hospital, I believe), he said, "A little burst of genius, sir!" West was one of those happy mortals who had not an idea of anything beyond himself or his own actual powers and knowledge. I once heard him say in a public room, that he thought he had quite as good an idea of Athens from reading the *Travelling Catalogues* of the place, as if he lived there for years. I believe this was strictly true, and that he would have come away with the same slender, literal, unenriched idea of it as he went. Looking at a picture of Rubens, which he had in his possession, he said with great indifference, "What a pity that this man wanted expression!" This natural self-complacency might be strengthened by collateral circumstances of birth and religion. West, as a native of America, might be supposed to own no superior in the commonwealth of art: as a Quaker, he smiled with sectarian self-sufficiency at the objections that were made to his theory or practice in painting. He lived long in the firm persuasion of being one of the elect among the sons of Fame, and went to his final rest in the arms of Immortality! Happy error! Envable old man!

Flaxman is another living and eminent artist, who is distinguished by success in his profession and by a prolonged and active old age. He is diminutive in person, like the others. I know little of him, but that he is an elegant sculptor, and a profound mystic. This last is a character common to many other artists in our days—Loutherbourg, Cosway, Blake, Sharp, Varley, &c.—who seem to relieve the literalness of their professional studies by voluntary excursions into the regions of the preter-

natural, pass their time between sleeping and waking, and whose ideas are like a stormy night, with the clouds driven rapidly across, and the blue sky and stars gleaming between!

Cosway is the last of these I shall mention. At that name I pause, and must be excused if I consecrate to him a *petit souvenir* in my best manner; for he was Fancy's child. What a fairy palace was his of specimens of art, antiquarianism, and *virtù*, jumbled all together in the richest disorder, dusty, shadowy, obscure, with much left to the imagination (how different from the finical, polished, petty, modernised air of some Collections we have seen!), and with copies of the old masters, cracked and damaged, which he touched and retouched with his own hand, and yet swore they were the genuine, the pure originals. All other collectors are fools to him: they go about with painful anxiety to find out the realities:—he *said* he had them—and in a moment made them of the breath of his nostrils and of the fumes of a lively imagination. His was the crucifix that Abelard prayed to—a lock of Eloise's hair—the dagger with which Felton stabbed the Duke of Buckingham—the first finished sketch of the *Jocunda*—Titian's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine—a mummy of an Egyptian king—a feather of a phoenix—a piece of Noah's Ark. Were the articles authentic? What matter?—his faith in them was true. He was gifted with a *second-sight* in such matters: he believed whatever was incredible. Fancy bore sway in him; and so vivid were his impressions, that they included the substances of things in them. The agreeable and the true with him were one. He believed in Swedenborgianism—he believed in animal magnetism—he had conversed with more than one person of the Trinity—he could talk with his lady at Mantua through some fine vehicle of sense, as we speak to a servant downstairs through a conduit-pipe. Richard Cosway was not the man to flinch

from an *ideal* proposition. Once, at an Academy dinner, when some question was made whether the story of Lambert's Leap was true, he started up, and said it was; for he was the person that performed it:—he once assured me that the kneepan of King James I. in the ceiling at Whitehall was nine feet across (he had measured it in concert with Mr. Cipriani, who was repairing the figures)—he could read in the *Book of the Revelations* without spectacles, and foretold the return of Buonaparte from Elba—and from St. Helena! His wife, the most ladylike of Englishwomen, being asked in Paris what sort of a man her husband was, made answer—“*Toujours riant, toujours gai.*”¹ This was his character. He must have been of French extraction. His soul appeared to possess the life of a bird; and such was the jauntiness of his air and manner, that to see him sit to have his half-boots laced on, you would fancy (by the help of a figure) that, instead of a little withered elderly gentleman, it was Venus attired by the Graces. His miniatures and whole-length drawings were not merely fashionable—they were fashion itself. His imitations of Michael Angelo were not the thing. When more than ninety, he retired from his profession, and used to hold up the palsied hand that had painted lords and ladies for upwards of sixty years, and smiled, with unabated good-humour, at the vanity of human wishes. Take him with all his faults and follies, we scarce “shall look upon his like again!”

Why should such persons ever die? It seems hard upon them and us! Care fixes no sting in their hearts, and their persons “present no mark to the foeman.” Death in them seizes upon living shadows. They scarce consume vital air: their gross functions are long at an end—they live but to paint, to talk or think. Is it that the vice of age, the miser's fault, gnaws them? Many of

¹ The Author was introduced to Cosway at Paris in 1802. See *Memoirs*, i., 92.—Ed.

them are not afraid of death, but of coming to want; and having begun in poverty, are haunted with the idea that they shall end in it, and so die—to *save charges*. Otherwise, they might linger on for ever, and “defy augury!”

*On Envy. (A Dialogue.)*¹

Hazlitt. I had a theory about Envy at one time, which I have partly given up of late—which was, that there was no such feeling, or that what is usually considered as envy or dislike of real merit is, more properly speaking, jealousy of false pretensions to it. I used to illustrate the argument by saying, that this was the reason we were not envious of the dead, because their merit was established beyond the reach of cavil or contradiction; whereas we are jealous and uneasy at sudden and upstart popularity, which wants the seal of time to confirm it, and which after all may turn out to be false and hollow. There is no danger that the testimony of ages should be reversed, and we add our suffrages to it with confidence, and even with enthusiasm. But we doubt reasonably enough, whether that which was applauded yesterday may not be condemned to-morrow; and are afraid of setting our names to a fraudulent claim to distinction. However satisfied we may be in our own minds, we are not sufficiently borne out by general opinion and sympathy to prevent certain misgivings and scruples on the subject. No one thinks, for instance, of denying the merit of Teniers in his particular style of art, and no one consequently thinks of envying him. The merit of Wilkie, on the contrary, was at first strongly contested, and there were other painters set up

¹ This appears to be elaborated out of a conversation between the Author and Northcote, printed among the other *Conversations* in 1830.—ED.

in opposition to him, till now that he has become a sort of *classic* in his way, he has ceased to be an object of envy or dislike, because no one doubts his real excellence, as far as it goes. He has no more than justice done him, and the mind never revolts at justice. It only rejects false or superficial claims to admiration, and is incensed to see the world take up with appearances, when they have no solid foundation to support them. We are not envious of Rubens or Raphael, because their fame is a pledge of their genius: but if anyone were to bring forward the highest living names as equal to these, it immediately sets the blood in a ferment, and we try to stifle the sense we have of their merits, not because they are new or modern, but because we are not sure they will ever be old. Could we be certain that posterity would sanction our award, we should grant it without scruple, even to an enemy and a rival.

Northcote. That which you describe is not envy. Envy is when you hate and would destroy all excellence that you do not yourself possess. So they say that Raphael, after he had copied the figures on one of the antique vases, endeavoured to deface them; and Hoppner, it has been said, used to get pictures of Sir Joshua's into his possession, on purpose to paint them over and spoil them.

Hazlitt. I do not believe the first, certainly. Raphael was too great a man, and with too fortunate a temper, to need or to wish to prop himself up on the ruins of others. As to Hoppner, he might perhaps think that there was no good reason for the preference given to Sir Joshua's portraits over his own, that his women of quality were the more airy and fashionable of the two, and might be tempted (once perhaps) in a fit of spleen, of caprice or impatience, to blot what was an eyesore to himself from its old-fashioned, faded, dingy look, and at the same time dazzled others from the force of tradition and prejudice. Why, he might argue, should that old fellow run away

with all the popularity even among those who (as he well knew) in their hearts preferred his own insipid, flaunting style to any other? Though it might be true that Sir Joshua was the greater painter, yet it was not true that Lords and Ladies thought so: he felt that he ought to be *their* favourite, and he might naturally hate what was continually *thrust in his dish*, and (as far as those about him were concerned) unjustly set over his head. Besides, Hoppner had very little of his own to rely on, and might wish, by destroying, to conceal the source from whence he had borrowed almost everything.

Northcote. Did you never feel envy?

Hazlitt. Very little, I think. In truth, I am out of the way of it: for the only pretension of which I am tenacious, is that of being a metaphysician; and there is so little attention paid to this subject to pamper one's vanity, and so little fear of losing that little from competition, that there is scarcely any room for envy here. One occupies the niche of eminence in which one places one's self, very quietly and contentedly! If I have ever felt this passion at all, it has been where some very paltry fellow has by trick and management contrived to obtain much more credit than he was entitled to. There was ——,¹ to whom I had a perfect antipathy. He was the antithesis of a man of genius; and yet he did better, by mere dint of dulness, than many men of genius. This was intolerable. There was something in the man and in his manner, with which you could not possibly connect the idea of admiration, or of anything that was not merely mechanical—

His look made the still air cold.

He repelled all sympathy and cordiality. What he did (though amounting to mediocrity) was an insult on the understanding. It seemed that he should be able *to do nothing*; for he was nothing either in himself or in other

¹ Probably Godwin is the person meant here.—Ed.

people's idea of him! Mean actions or gross expressions too often unsettle one's theory of genius. We are unable as well as unwilling to connect the feeling of high intellect with low moral sentiment: the one is a kind of desecration of the other. I have for this reason been sometimes disposed to disparage Turner's fine landscapes, and be glad when he failed in his higher attempts, in order that my conception of the artist and his pictures might be more of a piece. This is not envy or an impatience of extraordinary merit, but an impatience of the incongruities in human nature, and of the drawbacks and stumbling-blocks in the way of our admiration of it. Who is there that admires the Author of *Waverley* more than I do? Who is there that despises Sir Walter Scott more? I do not like to think there should be a second instance of the same person's being

The wisest, meanest of mankind—

and should be heartily glad if the greatest genius of the age should turn out to be an honest man. The only thing that renders this *mis-alliance* between first-rate intellect and want of principle endurable is that such an extreme instance of it teaches us that great moral lesson of moderating our expectations of human perfection, and enlarging our indulgence for human infirmity.

Northcote. You start off with an idea as usual, and torture the plain state of the case into a paradox. There may be some truth in what you suppose; but malice or selfishness is at the bottom of the severity of your criticism, not the love of truth or justice, though you may make it the pretext. You are more angry at Sir Walter Scott's success than at his servility. You would give yourself no trouble about his poverty of spirit, if he had not made a hundred thousand pounds by his writings. The sting lies there, though you may try to conceal it from yourself.

Hazlitt. I do not think so. I hate the sight of the Duke of Wellington for his foolish face, as much as for anything else. I cannot believe that a great general is contained under such a pasteboard vizor of a man. This, you'll say, is party spite, and rage at his good-fortune. I deny it. I always liked Lord Castlereagh for the gallant spirit that shone through his appearance; and his fine bust surmounted and crushed fifty orders that glittered beneath it. Nature seemed to have meant him for something better than he was. But in the other instance, Fortune has evidently played Nature a trick,

To throw a cruel sunshine on a fool.

Northcote. The truth is, you were reconciled to Lord Castlereagh's face, and patronised his person, because you felt a sort of advantage over him in point of style. His blunders qualified his success; and you fancied you could take his speeches in pieces, whereas you could not undo the battles that the other had won.

Hazlitt. So I have been accused of denying the merits of Pitt, from political dislike and prejudice: but who is there that has praised Burke more than I have? It is a subject that I am never weary of, because I feel it.

Northcote. You mean, because he is dead, and is now little talked of; and you think you show superior discernment and liberality by praising him. If there was a *Burke Club*, you would say nothing about him. You deceive yourself as to your own motives, and weave a wrong theory out of them for human nature. The love of distinction is the ruling passion of the human mind; we grudge whatever draws off attention from ourselves to others; and all our actions are but different contrivances, either by sheer malice or affected liberality, to keep it to ourselves or share it with others. Goldsmith was jealous even of beauty in the other sex. When the people at Amsterdam gathered round the balcony to look at the

Miss Hornecks, he grew impatient, and said peevishly, "There are places where I also am admired." It may be said—What could their beauty have to do with his reputation? No: it could not tend to lessen it, but it drew admiration from himself to them. So Mr. Croker,¹ the other day, when he was at the Academy dinner, made himself conspicuous by displaying the same feeling. He found fault with everything, *damned* all the pictures—landscapes, portraits, busts, nothing pleased him; and not contented with this, he then fell foul of the art itself, which he treated as a piece of idle foolery, and said that Raphael had thrown away his time in doing what was not worth the trouble. This, besides being insincere, was a great breach of good-manners, which none but a low-bred man would be guilty of; but he felt his own consequence annoyed; he saw a splendid exhibition of art, a splendid dinner set out, the nobility, the Cabinet Ministers, the branches of the Royal Family invited to it; the most eminent professors were there present; it was a triumph and a celebration of art, a dazzling proof of the height to which it had attained in this country, and of the esteem in which it was held. He felt that he played a very subordinate part in all this; and in order to relieve his own wounded vanity, he was determined (as he thought) to mortify that of others. He wanted to make himself of more importance than anybody else, by trampling on Raphael and on the art itself. It was ridiculous and disgusting, because every one saw through the motive; so that he defeated his own object.

Hazlitt. And he would have avoided this exposure, if with all his conceit and ill-humour, he had had the smallest taste for the art, or perception of the beauties of Raphael. He has just knowledge enough of drawing to make a whole-length sketch of Buonaparte, verging on

¹ The Right Honourable John Wilson Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty—the *Talking Potato*.—Ed.

caricature, yet not palpably outraging probability; so that it looked like a fat, stupid, *commonplace* man, or a flattering likeness of some legitimate monarch—he had skill, cunning, servility enough to do this with his own hand, and to circulate a print of it with zealous activity, as an indirect means of degrading him in appearance to that low level to which fortune had once raised him in reality. But the man who could do this deliberately, and with satisfaction to his own nature, was not the man to understand Raphael, and might slander him or any other, the greatest of earth's born, without injuring or belying any feeling of admiration or excellence in his own breast; for no such feeling had ever entered there.

Northcote. Come, this is always the way. Now you are growing personal. Why do you so constantly let your temper get the better of your reason?

Hazlitt. Because I hate a hypocrite, a timeserver, and a slave. But to return to the question, and say no more about this "*talking potato*"¹—I do not think that, except in circumstances of peculiar aggravation, or of extraordinary ill-temper and moroseness of disposition, anyone who has a thorough feeling of excellence has a delight in gainsaying it. The excellence that we feel, we participate in as if it were our own—it becomes ours by transfusion of mind—it is instilled into our hearts—it mingles with our blood. We are unwilling to allow merit, because we are unable to perceive it. But to be convinced of it, is to be ready to acknowledge and pay homage to it. Illiberality or narrowness of feeling is a narrowness of taste, a want of proper *tact*. A bigoted and exclusive spirit is real blindness to all excellence but our own, or that of some particular school or sect. I think I can give an instance of this in some friends of mine, on whom you

¹ Mr. Croker made his first appearance in this country as a hack-writer, and received this surname from the classic lips of Mr. Cumberland.

will be disposed to have no more mercy than I have on Mr. Croker—I mean the *Lake School*. Their system of Ostracism is not unnatural: it begins only with the natural limits of their tastes and feelings. Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Coleridge, and Mr. Southey have no feeling for the excellence of Pope, or Goldsmith, or Gray—they do not enter at all into their merits, and on that account it is that they deny, proscribe, and envy them. *Incredulus odi* is the explanation here, and in all such cases. I am satisfied that the fine turn of thought in Pope, the gliding verse of Goldsmith, the brilliant diction of Gray have no charms for the Author of the *Lyrical Ballads*: he has no faculty in his mind to which these qualities of poetry address themselves. It is not an oppressive, galling sense of them, and a burning envy to rival them, and shame that he cannot—he would not, if he could. He has no more ambition to write couplets like Pope, than to turn a barrel-organ. He has no pleasure in such poetry, and therefore he has no patience with others that have. The enthusiasm that they feel and express on the subject seems an effect without a cause, and puzzles and provokes the mind accordingly. Mr. Wordsworth, in particular, is narrower in his tastes than other people, because he sees everything from a single and original point of view. Whatever does not fall in strictly with this, he accounts no better than a delusion, or a play upon words.

Northcote. You mistake the matter altogether. The acting principle in their minds is an inveterate selfishness or desire of distinction. They see that a particular kind of excellence has been carried to its height—a height that they have no hope of arriving at—the road is stopped up; they must therefore strike into a different path; and in order to divert the public mind and draw attention to themselves, they affect to decry the old models, and overturn what they cannot rival. They know they cannot write like Pope or Dryden, or would be only imitators if

they did ; and they consequently strive to gain an original and equal celebrity by singularity and affectation. Their simplicity is not natural to them : it is the *forlorn-hope* of impotent and disappointed vanity.

Hazlitt. I cannot think that. It may be so in part, but not principally or altogether. Their minds are cast in a peculiar mould, and they cannot produce nor receive any other impressions than those which they do. They are, as to matters of taste, *très bornés*.

Northcote. You make them out stupider than I thought. I have sometimes spoken disrespectfully of their talents, and so I think, comparatively with those of some of our standard writers. But I certainly should never conceive them so lost to common sense as not to perceive the beauty, or splendour, or strength of Pope and Dryden. They are dazzled by it, and wilfully shut their eyes to it, and try to throw dust in those of other people. We easily discern and are confounded by excellence which we are conscious we should in vain attempt to equal. We may see that another is taller than ourselves, and yet we may know that we can never grow to his stature. A dwarf may easily envy a giant.

Hazlitt. They would like the comparison to Polyphemus in *Acis and Galatea* better. They think that little men have run away with the prize of beauty.

Northcote. No one admires poetry more than I do, or sees more beauties in it ; though if I were to try for a thousand years, I should never be able to do anything to please myself.

Hazlitt. Perhaps not in the mechanical part ; but still you admire and are most struck with those passages in poetry that accord with the previous train of your own feelings, and give you back the images of your own mind. There is something congenial in taste, at least, between ourselves and those whom we admire. I do not think there is any point of sympathy between Pope and the *Lake*

School: on the contrary, I know there is an antipathy between them.—When you speak of Titian, you look like him. I can understand how it is that you talk so well on that subject, and that your discourse has an extreme-unction about it, a marrowiness like his colouring. But I do not believe that the late Mr. West had the least notion of Titian's peculiar excellences—he would think one of his own copies of him as good as the original, and his own historical compositions much better. He would therefore, I conceive, sit and listen to a conversation in praise of him with something like impatience, and think it an interruption to more important discussions on the principles of high art. But if Mr. West had ever seen in nature what there is to be found in Titian's copies from it, he would never have thought of such a comparison, and would have bowed his head in deep humility at the very mention of his name. He might not have been able to do like him, and yet might have seen nature with the same eyes.

Northcote. We do not always admire most what we can do best; but often the contrary. Sir Joshua's admiration of Michael Angelo was perfectly sincere and unaffected; but yet nothing could be more diametrically opposite than the minds of the two men—there was an absolute gulph between them. It was the consciousness of his own inability to execute such works, that made him more sensible of the difficulty and the merit. It was the same with his fondness for Poussin. He was always exceedingly angry with me for not admiring him enough. But this showed his good sense and modesty. Sir Joshua was always on the *lookout* for whatever might enlarge his notions on the subject of his art, and supply his defects; and did not, like some artists, measure all possible excellence by his own actual deficiencies. He thus improved and learned something daily. Others have lost their way by setting out with a pragmatical notion of

their own self-sufficiency, and have never advanced a single step beyond their first crude conceptions. Fuseli was to blame in this respect. He did not want capacity or enthusiasm, but he had an overweening opinion of his own peculiar acquirements. Speaking of Vandyke, he said he would not go across the way to see the finest portrait he had ever painted. He asked—"What is it but a little bit of colour?" Sir Joshua said, on hearing this—"Aye, he'll live to repent it." And he has lived to repent it. With that little bit added to his own heap, he would have been a much greater painter, and a happier man.

Hazlitt. Yes: but I doubt whether he could have added it in practice. I think the indifference, in the first instance, arises from the want of taste and capacity. If Fuseli had possessed an eye for colour, he would not have despised it in Vandyke. But we reduce others to the limits of our own capacity. We think little of what we cannot do, and envy it where we imagine that it meets with disproportioned admiration from others. A dull, pompous, and obscure writer has been heard to exclaim, "That *dunce* Wordsworth!" This was excusable in one who is utterly without feeling for any objects in nature but those who would make splendid furniture for a drawing-room, or any sentiment of the human heart but that with which a slave looks up to a despot, or a despot looks down upon a slave. This contemptuous expression was an effusion of spleen and impatience at the idea that there should be anyone who preferred Wordsworth's descriptions of a daisy or a linnet's nest to his *auctioneer*-poetry about curtains, and palls, and sceptres, and precious stones: but had Wordsworth, in addition to his original sin of simplicity and true genius, been a popular writer, his contempt would have turned into hatred. As it is, he tolerates his *idle nonsense*: there is a link of friendship in mutual political servility; and besides, he has a fellow-feeling with him, as one of those writers of whose merits

the world have not been fully sensible. Mr. Croly¹ set out with high pretensions, and had some idea of rivalling Lord Byron in a certain lofty, imposing style of versification : but he is probably by this time convinced that mere constitutional *hauteur* as ill supplies the place of elevation of genius as of the pride of birth ; and that the public know how to distinguish between a string of gaudy, painted, turgid phrases, and the vivid creations of fancy, or touching delineations of the human heart.

Northcote. What did you say the writer's name was ?

Hazlitt. Croly. He is one of the Royal Society of Authors.

Northcote. I never heard of him. Is he an imitator of Lord Byron, did you say ?

Hazlitt. I am afraid neither he nor Lord Byron would have it thought so.

Northcote. Such imitators do all the mischief, and bring real genius into disrepute. This is in some measure an excuse for those who have endeavoured to disparage Pope and Dryden. We have had a surfeit of imitations of them. Poetry, in the hands of a set of mechanic scribblers, had become such a tame, mawkish thing, that we could endure it no longer, and our impatience of the abuse of a good thing transferred itself to the original source. It was this which enabled Wordsworth and the rest to raise up a new school (or to attempt it) on the ruins of Pope ; because a race of writers had succeeded him without one particle of his wit, sense, and delicacy, and the world were tired of their everlasting *sing-song* and *namby-pamby*. People were disgusted at hearing the faults of Pope (the part most easily imitated) cried up as his greatest excellence, and were willing to take refuge from such nauseous cant in any novelty.

¹ The Rev. Geo. Croly, one of the contributors to the *London Magazine* (see *Memoirs of W. H.*, ii., 6-7), and the author of several works, including two volumes of verse printed in 1830.—Ed.

Hazlitt. What you now observe comes nearly to my account of the matter. *Sir Andrew Wylie*¹ will sicken people of the Author of *Waverley*. It was but the other day that someone was proposing that there should be a Society formed for not reading the Scotch novels. But it is not the excellence of that fine writer that we are tired of, or revolt at, but vapid imitations or catchpenny repetitions of himself. Even the quantity of them has an obvious tendency to lead to this effect. It lessens, instead of increasing our admiration: for it seems to be an evidence that there is no difficulty in the task, and leads us to suspect something like trick or deception in their production. We have not been used to look upon works of genius as of the *fungus* tribe. Yet these are so. We had rather doubt our own taste than ascribe such a superiority of genius to another that it works without consciousness or effort, executes the labour of a life in a few weeks, writes faster than the public can read, and scatters the rich materials of thought and feeling like so much chaff.

Northcote. Aye, there it is. We had rather do anything than acknowledge the merit of another, if we have any possible excuse or evasion to help it. Depend upon it, you are glad Sir Walter Scott is a Tory—because it gives you an opportunity of qualifying your involuntary admiration of him. You would be sorry indeed if he were what you call an *honest man*! Envy is like a viper coiled up at the bottom of the heart, ready to spring upon and poison whatever approaches it. We live upon the vices, the imperfections, the misfortunes, and disappointments of others, as our natural food. We cannot bear a superior or an equal. Even our pretended cordial admiration is only a subterfuge of our vanity. By raising one, we proportionably lower and mortify others. Our

¹ An indifferent novel by Mr. John Galt, supposed to have been written in imitation of the *Waverley* series.—Ed.

self-love may perhaps be taken by surprise and thrown off its guard by novelty; but it soon recovers itself, and begins to cool in its warmest expressions, and find every possible fault. Ridicule, for this reason, is sure to prevail over truth, because the malice of mankind thrown into the scale gives the casting-weight. We have one succession of authors, of painters, of favourites, after another, whom we hail in their turns, because they operate as a diversion to one another, and relieve us of the galling sense of the superiority of any one individual for any length of time. By changing the object of our admiration, we secretly persuade ourselves that there is no such thing as excellence. It is that which we hate above all things. It is the worm that gnaws us, that never dies. The mob shout when a king or a conqueror appears: they would take him and tear him to pieces, but that he is the scapegoat of their pride and vanity, and makes all other men appear like a herd of slaves and cowards. Instead of a thousand equals, we compound for one superior, and allay all heartburnings and animosities among ourselves, by giving the palm to *the least worthy*. This is the secret of monarchy.—Loyalty is not the love of kings, but hatred and jealousy of mankind. A lacquey rides behind his lord's coach, and feels no envy of his master. Why? because he looks down and laughs, in his borrowed finery, at the ragged rabble below. Is it not so in our profession? What Academician eats his dinner in peace, if a rival sits near him; if his own are not the most admired pictures in the room; or, in that case, if there are any others that are at all admired, and divide distinction with him? Is not every artifice used to place the pictures of other artists in the worst light? Do they not go there after their performances are hung up, and try to *paint one another out*? What is the case among players? Does not a favourite actor threaten to leave the stage, as soon as a new candidate for public

favour is taken the least notice of? Would not a manager of a theatre (who has himself pretensions) sooner see it burnt down, than that it should be saved from ruin and lifted into the full tide of public prosperity and favour by the efforts of one whom he conceives to have supplanted himself in the popular opinion? Do we not see an author, who has had a tragedy damned, sit at the play every night of a new performance for years after, in the hopes of gaining a new companion in defeat? Is it not an indelible offence to a picture-collector and patron of the arts, to hint that another has a fine head in his collection? Will any merchant in the city allow another to be worth a *plum*? What wit will applaud a *bon mot* by a rival? He sits uneasy and out of countenance till he has made another which he thinks will make the company forget the first. Do women ever allow beauty in others? Observe the people in a country town, and see how they look at those who are better dressed than themselves; listen to the talk in country places, and mind if it is composed of anything but slanders, gossip, and lies.

Hazlitt. But don't you yourself admire Sir Joshua Reynolds?

Northcote. Why, yes: I think I have no envy myself, and yet I have sometimes caught myself at it. I don't know that I do not admire Sir Joshua merely as a screen against the reputation of bad pictures.

Hazlitt. Then, at any rate, what I say is true: we envy the good less than we do the bad.

Northcote. I do not think so; and am not sure that Sir Joshua himself did not admire Michael Angelo to get rid of the superiority of Titian, Rubens, and Rembrandt, which pressed closer on him, and "galled his kibe more."

Hazlitt. I should not think that at all unlikely; for I look upon Sir Joshua as rather a spiteful man, and always thought he could have little real feeling for the

works of Michael Angelo or Raphael, which he extolled so highly, or he would not have been insensible to their effect the first time he ever beheld them.

Northcote. He liked Sir Peter Lely better.

On Sitting for One's Picture.

THERE is a pleasure in sitting for one's picture, which many persons are not aware of. People are coy on this subject at first, coquet with it, and pretend not to like it, as is the case with other venial indulgences, but they soon get over their scruples, and become resigned to their fate. There is a conscious vanity in it; and vanity is the *aurum potabile* in all our pleasures, the true *elixir* of human life. The sitter at first affects an air of indifference, throws himself into a slovenly or awkward position, like a clown when he goes a courting for the first time, but gradually recovers himself, attempts an attitude, and calls up his best looks, the moment he receives intimation that there is something about him that will do for a picture. The beggar in the street is proud to have his picture painted, and would almost sit for nothing: ¹ the finest lady in the land is as fond of sitting to a favourite artist as of seating herself before her looking-glass; and the more so, as the glass in this case is sensible of her charms, and does all it can to fix or heighten them. Kings lay aside their crowns to sit for their portraits, and poets their laurels to sit for their busts! I am sure my father had as little vanity, and as little love for the art, as most persons: yet when he had sat to me a few times (now some twenty years ago), ² he

¹ The Author himself painted a small portrait in oils of a poor old woman whom he met near Manchester in 1803.—ED.

² This was in 1804, when the sitter was in his 67th year, and Unitarian minister at Wem, in Shropshire.—ED.

grew evidently uneasy when it was a fine day, that is, when the sun shone into the room, so that we could not paint; and when it became cloudy, began to bustle about, and ask me if I was not getting ready. Poor old room! Does the sun still shine into thee, or does Hope fling its colours round thy walls, gaudier than the rainbow? No, never, while thy oak panels endure, will they inclose such fine movements of the brain as passed through mine, when the fresh hues of nature gleamed from the canvas, and my heart silently breathed the names of Rembrandt and Correggio! Between my father's love of sitting and mine of painting, we hit upon a tolerable likeness at last; but the picture is cracked and gone; and *Megilp* (that bane of the English school) has destroyed¹ as fine an old Nonconformist head as one could hope to see in these degenerate times.

The fact is, that the having one's picture painted is like the creation of another self; and that is an idea, of the repetition or reduplication of which no man is ever tired, to the thousandth reflection. It has been said that lovers are never tired of each other's company, because they are always talking of themselves. This seems to be the bond of connexion (a delicate one it is!) between the painter and the sitter—they are always thinking and talking of the same thing, the picture, in which their self-love finds an equal counterpart. There is always something to be done or to be altered, that touches that sensitive chord—this feature was not exactly hit off, something is wanting to the nose or to the eyebrows, it may perhaps be as well to leave out this mark or that blemish, if it were possible to recal an expression that was remarked a short time before, it would be an indescribable advantage to the picture—a squint or a pimple on the face handsomely avoided may be a link of

¹ This is saying a little too much, perhaps; the picture is still in a fair state of preservation, and will probably never go worse.—ED.

attachment ever after. He is no mean friend who conceals from ourselves, or only gently indicates, our obvious defects to the world. The sitter, by his repeated, minute, *fidgety* inquiries about himself may be supposed to take an indirect and laudable method of arriving at self-knowledge; and the artist, in self-defence, is obliged to cultivate a scrupulous tenderness towards the feelings of his sitter, lest he should appear in the character of a spy upon him. I do not conceive there is a stronger call upon secret gratitude than the having made a favourable likeness of anyone; nor a surer ground of jealousy and dislike than the having failed in the attempt. A satire or a lampoon in writing is bad enough; but here we look doubly foolish, for we are ourselves parties to the plot, and have been at considerable pains to give evidence against ourselves. I have never had a plaster cast taken of myself: in truth, I rather shrink from the experiment; for I know I should be very much mortified if it did not turn out well, and should never forgive the unfortunate artist who had lent his assistance to prove that I looked like a blockhead!

The late Mr. Opie used to remark that the most sensible people made the best sitters; and I incline to his opinion, especially as I myself am an excellent sitter. Indeed, it seems to me a piece of mere impertinence not to sit as still as one can in these circumstances. I put the best face I can upon the matter, as well out of respect to the artist as to myself. I appear on my trial in the court of physiognomy, and am as anxious to make good a certain idea I have of myself, as if I were playing a part on a stage. I have no notion how people go to sleep who are sitting for their pictures. It is an evident sign of want of thought and of internal resources. There are some individuals, all whose ideas are in their hands and feet—make them sit still, and you put a stop to the machine altogether. The volatile spirit of quicksilver in them turns to a *caput*

mortuum. Children are particularly sensible of this constraint from their thoughtlessness and liveliness. It is the next thing with them to wearing the fool's cap at school: yet they are proud of having their pictures taken, ask when they are to sit again, and are mightily pleased when they are done. Charles the First's children seem to have been good sitters, and the great dog sits like a Lord Chancellor.

The second time a person sits, and the view of the features is determined, the head seems fastened in an imaginary *vice*, and he can hardly tell what to make of his situation. He is continually overstepping the bounds of duty, and is tied down to certain lines and limits chalked out upon the canvas, to him "invisible or dimly seen" on the throne where he is exalted. The painter has now a difficult task to manage—to throw in his gentle admonitions, "A little more this way, sir," or "You bend rather too forward, madam,"—and ought to have a delicate white hand, that he may venture to adjust a straggling lock of hair, or by giving a slight turn to the head, co-operate in the practical attainment of a position. These are the ticklish and tiresome places of the work, before much progress is made, where the sitter grows peevish and abstracted, and the painter more anxious and particular than he was the day before. Now is the time to fling in a few adroit compliments, or to introduce general topics of conversation. The artist ought to be a well-informed and agreeable man—able to expatiate on his art, and abounding in lively and characteristic anecdotes. Yet he ought not to talk too much, or to grow too animated; or the picture is apt to stand still, and the sitter to be aware of it. Accordingly, the best talkers in the profession have not always been the most successful portrait-painters. For this purpose it is desirable to bring a friend, who may relieve guard, or fill up the pauses of conversation occasioned by the necessary attention of the painter to his

business, and by the involuntary reveries of the sitter on what his own likeness will bring forth; or a book, a newspaper, or a portfolio of prints may serve to amuse the time. When the sitter's face begins to flag, the artist may then properly start a fresh topic of discourse, and while his attention is fixed on the graces called out by the varying interest of the subject, and the model anticipates, pleased and smiling, their being transferred every moment to the canvas, nothing is wanting to improve and carry to its height the amicable understanding and mutual satisfaction and good-will subsisting between these two persons so happily occupied with each other!

Sir Joshua must have had a fine time of it with his sitters. Lords, ladies, generals, authors, opera-singers, musicians, the learned and the polite, besieged his doors,¹ and found an unfailing welcome. What a rustling of silks! What a fluttering of flounces and brocades! What a cloud of powder and perfumes! What a flow of periwigs! What an exchange of civilities and of titles! What a recognition of old friendships, and an introduction of new acquaintance and sitters! It must, I think, be allowed that this is the only mode in which genius can form a legitimate union with wealth and fashion. There is a secret and sufficient tie in interest and vanity. Abstract topics of wit or learning do not furnish a connecting link: but the painter, the sculptor, come in close contact with the persons of the Great. The lady of quality, the courtier, and the artist, meet and shake hands on this common ground; the latter exercises a sort of natural jurisdiction and dictatorial power over the pretensions of the first to external beauty and accomplishment, which produces a mild sense and tone of equality; and the opulent sitter pays the taker of flattering likenesses

¹ The great house in Leicester Square, where Messrs. Puttick and Simpson, book-auctioneers, now have their business premises, was Sir Joshua's private residence.—Ed.

handsomely for his trouble, which does not lessen the sympathy between them. There is even a satisfaction in paying down a high price for a picture—it seems as if one's head was worth something!—During the first sitting, Sir Joshua did little but chat with the new candidate for the fame of portraiture, try an attitude, or remark an expression. His object was to gain time, by not being in haste to commit himself, until he was master of the subject before him. No one ever dropped in but the friends and acquaintance of the sitter—it was a rule with Sir Joshua that from the moment the latter entered, he was at home—the room belonged to him—but what secret whisperings would there be among these, what confidential, inaudible communications! It must be a refreshing moment, when the cake and wine had been handed round, and the artist began again. He, as it were, by this act of hospitality assumed a new character, and acquired a double claim to confidence and respect. In the meantime, the sitter would perhaps glance his eye round the room, and see a Titian or a Vandyke hanging in one corner, with a transient feeling of scepticism whether he should make such a picture. How the ladies of quality and fashion must bless themselves from being made to look like Dr. Johnson or Goldsmith! How proud the first of these would be, how happy the last, to fill the same armchair where the Burnburies and the Hornecks had sat! How superior the painter would feel to them all! By “happy alchemy of mind,” he brought out all their good qualities and reconciled their defects, gave an air of studious ease to his learned friends, or lighted up the face of folly and fashion with intelligence and graceful smiles. Those portraits, however, that were most admired at the time, do not retain their pre-eminence now: the thought remains upon the brow, while the colour has faded from the cheek, or the dress grown obsolete; and after all, Sir Joshua's best pictures are those of his worst sitters—*his children*. They suited

best with his unfinished style; and are like the infancy of the art itself—happy, bold, and careless. Sir Joshua formed the circle of his private friends from the *élite* of his sitters; and Vandyke was, it appears, on the same footing with his. When any of those noble or distinguished persons whom he has immortalised with his pencil, were sitting to him, he used to ask them to dinner, and afterwards it was their custom to return to the picture again, so that it is said that many of his finest portraits were done in this manner, ere the colours were yet dry, in the course of a single day. Oh! ephemeral works to last for ever!

Vandyke married a daughter of Earl Gower, of whom there is a very beautiful picture. She was the *Cenone*, and he his own *Paris*. A painter of the name of Astley married a Lady ———, who sat to him for her picture. He was a wretched hand, but a fine person of a man, and a great coxcomb; and on his strutting up and down before the portrait when it was done with a prodigious air of satisfaction, she observed, "If he was so pleased with the copy, he might have the original." This Astley was a person of magnificent habits and a sumptuous taste in living; and is the same of whom the anecdote is recorded, that when some English students walking out near Rome were compelled by the heat to strip off their coats, Astley displayed a waistcoat with a huge waterfall streaming down the back of it, which was a piece of one of his own canvases that he had converted to this purpose. Sir Joshua fell in love with one of his fair sitters, a young and beautiful girl, who ran out one day in a great panic and confusion, hid her face in her companion's lap who was reading in an outer room, and said, "Sir Joshua had made her an offer!" This circumstance perhaps deserves mentioning the more, because there is a general idea that Sir Joshua Reynolds was a confirmed old bachelor. Goldsmith conceived a fruitless attachment to the same

painting "A Diana and Nymphs" is like plunging into a cold bath of desire: to make a statue of a "Venus" transforms the sculptor himself to stone. The snow on the lap of beauty freezes the soul. The heedless, unsuspecting licence of foreign manners gives the artist abroad an advantage over ours at home. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted only the head of "Iphigene" from a beautiful woman of quality: Canova had innocent girls to sit to him for his "Graces." The Princess Borghese, whose symmetry of form was admirable, sat to him for a model, which he considered as his masterpiece and the perfection of the female form; and when asked if she did not feel uncomfortable while it was taking, she replied with great indifference, "No: it was not cold!" I have but one other word to add on this part of the subject: if having to paint a delicate and modest female is a temptation to gallantry, on the other hand the sitting to a lady for one's picture is a still more trying situation, and amounts (almost of itself) to a declaration of love!

Landscape-painting is free from these tormenting dilemmas and embarrassments. It is as full of the feeling of pastoral simplicity and ease, as portrait-painting is of personal vanity and egotism. Away, then, with those incumbrances to the true liberty of thought—the sitter's chair, the bag-wig and sword, the drapery, the lay figure—and let us to some retired spot in the country, take out our portfolio, plant our easel, and begin. We are all at once shrouded from observation—

The world forgetting, by the world forgot!

We enjoy the cool shade, with solitude and silence; or
hear the dashing waterfall,

Or stock-dove plain amid the forest deep,
That drowsy rustles to the sighing gale.

It seems almost a shame to do anything, we are so well content without it; but the eye is restless, and we must

have something to show when we get home. We set to work, and failure or success prompts us to go on. We take up the pencil, or lay it down again, as we please. We muse or paint, as objects strike our senses or our reflection. The perfect leisure we feel turns labour to a luxury. We try to imitate the grey colour of a rock or of the bark of a tree: the breeze wafted from its broad foliage gives us fresh spirits to proceed, we dip our pencil in the sky, or ask the white clouds sailing over its bosom to sit for their pictures. We are in no hurry, and have the day before us. Or else, escaping from the close-embowered scene, we catch fading distances on airy downs, and seize on golden sunsets with the fleecy flocks glittering in the evening ray, after a shower of rain has fallen. Or from Norwood's ridgy heights, survey the snake-like Thames, or its smoke-crowned capital;

Think of its crimes, its cares, its pain,
Then shield us in the woods again.

No one thinks of disturbing a landscape-painter at his task: he seems a kind of magician, the privileged genius of the place. Wherever a Claude, a Wilson has introduced his own portrait in the foreground of a picture, we look at it with interest (however ill it may be done), feeling that it is the portrait of one who was quite happy at the time, and how glad we should be to change places with him.

Mr. Burke has brought in a striking episode in one of his later works in allusion to Sir Joshua's portrait of Lord Keppel, with those of some other friends, painted in their better days. The portrait is indeed a fine one, worthy of the artist and the critic, and perhaps recalls Lord Keppel's memory oftener than any other circumstance at present.¹ Portrait-painting is in truth a sort of cement

¹ "No man lives too long, who lives to do with spirit, and suffer with resignation, what Providence pleases to command or inflict:

of friendship, and a clue to history. That blockhead, Mr. Croker, of the Admiralty, the other day blundered upon some observations of mine relating to this subject,

but indeed they are sharp incommodities which beset old age. It was but the other day, that in putting in order some things which had been brought here on my taking leave of London for ever, I looked over a number of fine portraits, most of them of persons now dead, but whose society, in my better days, made this a proud and happy place. Amongst these was the picture of Lord Keppel. It was painted by an artist worthy of the subject, the excellent friend of that excellent man from their earliest youth, and a common friend of us both, with whom we lived for many years without a moment of coldness, of peevishness, of jealousy, or of jar, to the day of our final separation.

"I ever looked on Lord Keppel as one of the greatest and best men of his age; and I loved and cultivated him accordingly. He was much in my heart, and I believe I was in his to the very last beat. It was after his trial at Porstmouth that he gave me this picture. With what zeal and anxious affection I attended him through that his agony of glory; what part, my son, in early flush and enthusiasm of his virtue and the pious passion with which he attached himself to all my connections, with what prodigality we both squandered ourselves in courting almost every sort of enmity for his sake, I believe he felt, just as I should have felt, such friendship on such an occasion."—*Letter to a Noble Lord*, p.29, Second Edition, printed for T. Williams.

I have given this passage entire here, because I wish to be informed, if I could, what is the construction of the last sentence of it. It has puzzled me all my life. One difficulty might be got over by making a pause after "I believe he felt," and leaving out the comma between "have felt" and "such friendship." That is, the meaning would be, "I believe he felt with what zeal and anxious affection," &c. "just as I should have felt such friendship on such an occasion." But then, again, what is to become of the "what part, my son?" &c. With what does this connect, or to what verb is "my son" the nominative case, or by what verb is "what part" governed? I should really be glad, if, from any manuscript, printed copy, or marginal correction, this point could be cleared up, and so fine a passage resolved, by any possible ellipsis, into ordinary grammar.

and made the House stare by asserting that portrait-painting was history or history portrait, as it happened; but went on to add, "That those gentlemen who had seen the ancient portraits lately exhibited in Pall Mall, must have been satisfied that they were strictly *historical*;" which showed that he knew nothing at all of the matter, and merely talked by rote. There was nothing historical in the generality of those portraits, except that they were portraits of people mentioned in history—there was no more of the spirit of history in them (which is *passion* or *action*) than in their dresses. But this is the way in which that person, by his pettifogging habits and literal understanding, always mistakes a verbal truism for sense, and a misnomer for wit! I was going to observe, that I think the aiding the recollection of our family and friends in our absence may be a frequent and strong inducement to sitting for our pictures; but that I believe the love of posthumous fame, or of continuing our memories after we are dead, has very little to do with it. And one reason I should give for that opinion is this, that we are not naturally very prone to dwell with pleasure on anything that may happen in relation to us after we are dead, because we are not fond of thinking of death at all. We shrink equally from the prospect of that fatal event or from any speculation on its consequences. The surviving ourselves in our pictures is but a poor compensation—it is rather adding mockery to a calamity. The perpetuating our names in the wide page of history or to a remote posterity is a vague calculation, that may take out the immediate sting of mortality—whereas we ourselves may hope to last (by a fortunate extension of the term of human life) almost as long as an ordinary portrait; and the wounds of lacerated friendship it heals must be still green, and our ashes scarcely cold. I think therefore that the looking forward to this mode of keeping alive the memory of what we were by lifeless hues and discoloured

features, is not among the most approved consolations of human life, or favourite dalliances of the imagination. Yet I own I should like some part of me, as the hair or even nails, to be preserved entire, or I should have no objection to lie like Whitfield in a state of petrification. This smacks of the bodily reality at least—acts like a deception to the spectator, and breaks the fall from this “sensible, warm motion to a kneaded clod”¹—from that to nothing—even to the person himself. I suspect that the idea of posthumous fame, which has so unwelcome a condition annexed to it, loses its general relish as we advance in life, and that it is only while we are young that we pamper our imaginations with this bait, with a sort of impunity. The reversion of immortality is then so distant, that we may talk of it without much fear of entering upon immediate possession: death is itself a fable—a sound that dies upon our lips; and the only certainty seems the only impossibility. Fame, at that romantic period, is the first thing in our mouths, and death the last in our thoughts.

Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers?

No really great man ever thought himself so. The idea of greatness in the mind answers but ill to our knowledge—or to our ignorance of ourselves. What living prose-writer, for instance, would think of comparing himself with Burke? Yet would it not have been equal presumption or egotism in him to fancy himself equal to those who had gone before him—Bolingbroke, or Johnson, or Sir William Temple? Because his rank in letters is become a settled point with us, we conclude that it must

¹ *Measure for Measure*, iii., 1 [Dyce's Second Edit., i., 480].

have been quite as self-evident to him, and that he must have been perfectly conscious of his vast superiority to the rest of the world. Alas! not so. No man is truly himself but in the idea which others entertain of him. The mind, as well as the eye, "sees not itself, but by reflection from some other thing." What parity can there be between the effect of habitual composition on the mind of the individual, and the surprise occasioned by first reading a fine passage in an admired author; between what we do with ease, and what we thought it next to impossible ever to have done; between the reverential awe we have for years encouraged, without seeing reason to alter it, for distinguished genius, and the slow, reluctant, unwelcome conviction that after infinite toil and repeated disappointments, and when it is too late and to little purpose, we have ourselves at length accomplished what we at first proposed; between the insignificance of our petty, personal pretensions, and the vastness and splendour which the atmosphere of imagination lends to an illustrious name? He who comes up to his own idea of greatness, must always have had a very low standard of it in his mind. "What a pity," said some one, "that Milton had not the pleasure of reading *Paradise Lost*!" He could not read it, as we do, with the weight of impression that a hundred years of admiration have added to it—"a phoenix gazed by all"—with the sense of the number of editions it has passed through with still increasing reputation, with the tone of solidity, time-proof, which it has received from the breath of cold, envious maligners, with the sound which the voice of Fame has lent to every line of it! The writer of an ephemeral production may be as much dazzled with it as the public: it may sparkle in his own eyes for a moment, and be soon forgotten by every one else. But no one can anticipate the suffrages of posterity. Every man, in judging of himself, is his own contemporary. He may feel the gale of popularity, but

he cannot tell how long it will last. His opinion of himself wants distance, wants time, wants numbers, to set it off and confirm it. He must be indifferent to his own merits before he can feel a confidence in them. Besides, everyone must be sensible of a thousand weaknesses and deficiencies in himself; whereas Genius only leaves behind it the monuments of its strength. A great name is an abstraction of some one excellence: but whoever fancies himself an abstraction of excellence, so far from being great, may be sure that he is a blockhead, equally ignorant of excellence or defect, of himself or others. Mr. Burke, besides being the author of the *Reflections*, and the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, had a wife and son; and had to think as much about them as we do about him. The imagination gains nothing by the minute details of personal knowledge.

On the other hand, it may be said that no man knows so well as the author of any performance what it has cost him, and the length of time and study devoted to it. This is one, among other reasons, why no man can pronounce an opinion upon himself. The happiness of the result bears no proportion to the difficulties overcome or the pains taken. *Materiam superabat opus*, is an old and fatal complaint. The definition of genius is that it acts unconsciously; and those who have produced immortal works have done so without knowing how or why. The greatest power operates unseen, and executes its appointed task with as little ostentation as difficulty. Whatever is done best, is done from the natural bent and disposition of the mind. It is only where our incapacity begins, that we begin to feel the obstacles, and to set an undue value on our triumph over them. Correggio, Michael Angelo, Rembrandt, did what they did without premeditation or effort—their works came from their minds as a natural birth—if you had asked them why they adopted this or that style, they would have answered, *because they*

could not help it, and because they knew of no other. So Shakespeare says :—

Our poesy is as a gum which oozes
From whence 'tis nourish'd : the fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck : our gentle flame
Provokes itself ; and, like the current, flies
Each bound it chafes.¹

Shakespeare himself was an example of his own rule, and appears to have owed almost everything to industry or design. His poetry flashes from him like the lightning from the summer-cloud, or the stroke from the sunflower. When we look at the admirable comic designs of Hogarth, they seem from the unfinished state in which they are left, and from the freedom of the pencilling, to have cost him little trouble ; whereas the “*Sigismunda*” is a very laboured and comparatively feeble performance, and he accordingly set great store by it. He also thought highly of his portraits, and boasted that “he could paint equal to Vandyke, give him his time and let him choose his subject.” This was the very reason why he could not. Vandyke's excellence consisted in this, that he could paint a fine portrait of anyone at sight : let him take ever so much pains or choose ever so bad a subject, he could not help making something of it. His eye, his mind, his hand was cast in the mould of grace and delicacy. Milton, again, is understood to have preferred *Paradise Regained* to his other works. This, if so, was either because he himself was conscious of having failed in it, or because others thought he had. We are willing to think well of that which we know wants our favourable opinion, and to prop the rickety bantling. Every step taken, *invitâ Minerva*, costs us something, and is set down to account ; whereas we are borne on the full tide of genius and success into the very haven of our desires almost imperceptibly. The strength of the impulse by

¹ *Timon of Athens*, i., 1.

which we are carried along prevents the sense of difficulty or resistance : the true inspiration of the Muse is soft and balmy as the air we breathe ; and indeed leaves us little to boast of, for the effect hardly seems to be our own.

There are two persons who always appear to me to have worked under this involuntary, silent impulse more than any others ; I mean Rembrandt and Correggio. It is not known that Correggio ever saw a picture of any great master. He lived and died obscurely in an obscure village. We have few of his works, but they are all perfect. What truth, what grace, what angelic sweetness are there ! Not one line or tone that is not divinely soft or exquisitely fair ; the painter's mind rejecting, by a natural process, all that is discordant, coarse, or unpleasing. The whole is an emanation of pure thought. The work grew under his hand as if of itself, and came out without a flaw, like the diamond from the rock. He knew not what he did ; and looked at each modest grace as it stole from the canvas with anxious delight and wonder. Ah ! gracious God ! not he alone ; how many more in all time have looked at their works with the same feelings, not knowing but they too may have done something divine, immortal, and finding in that sole doubt ample amends for pining solitude, for want, neglect, and an untimely fate. Oh ! for one hour of that uneasy rapture, when the mind first thinks that it has struck out something that may last for ever ; when the germ of excellence bursts from nothing on the startled sight ! Take, take away the gaudy triumphs of the world, the long deathless shout of fame, and give back that heart-felt sigh with which the youthful enthusiasts first wed immortality as his secret bride ! And thou too, Rembrandt ! Thou wert a man of genius, if ever painter was a man of genius !—did this dream hang over you as you painted that strange picture of "Jacob's Ladder" ? Did

your eye strain over those gradual dusky clouds into futurity, or did those white-vested, beaked figures babble to you of fame as they approached? Did you know what you were about, or did you not paint much as it happened? Oh! if you had thought once about yourself, or anything but the subject, it would have been all over with "the glory, the intuition, the amenity," the dream had fled, the spell had been broken. The hills would not have looked like those we see in sleep—that tatterdemalion figure of Jacob, thrown on one side, would not have slept as if the breath was fairly taken out of his body. So much do Rembrandt's pictures savour of the soul and body of reality, that the thoughts seem identical with the objects—if there had been the least question what he should have done, or how he should do it, or how far he had succeeded, it would have spoiled everything. Lumps of light hung upon his pencil and fell upon his canvas like dewdrops: the shadowy veil was drawn over his backgrounds by the dull, obtuse finger of night, making darkness visible by still greater darkness that could only be felt!

Cervantes is another instance of a man of genius, whose work may be said to have sprung from his mind, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Don Quixote and Sancho were a kind of twins; and the jests of the latter, as he says, fell from him like drops of rain when he least thought of it. Shakespeare's creations were more multiform, but equally natural and unstudied. Raphael and Milton seem partial exceptions to this rule. Their productions were the *composite order*; and those of the latter sometimes even amount to centos. Accordingly, we find Milton quoted among those authors who have left proofs of their entertaining a high opinion of themselves, and of cherishing a strong aspiration after fame. Some of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* have been also cited to the same purpose; but they seem rather to convey wayward and dissatisfied complaints of his untoward fortune than anything like

a triumphant and confident reliance on his future renown. He appears to have stood more alone and to have thought less about himself than any living being. One reason for this indifference may have been, that as a writer he was tolerably successful in his life-time, and no doubt produced his works with very great facility.

I hardly know whether to class Claude Lorraine as among those who succeeded most "through happiness or pains." It is certain that he imitated no one, and has had no successful imitator. The perfection of his landscapes seems to have been owing to an inherent quality of harmony, to an exquisite sense of delicacy in his mind. His monotony has been complained of, which is apparently produced from a preconceived idea in his mind ; and not long ago I heard a person, not more distinguished for the subtilty than the *naïveté* of his sarcasms, remark, "Oh ! I never look at Claude : if one has seen one of his pictures, one has seen them all ; they are every one alike : there is the same sky, the same climate, the same time of day, the same tree, and that tree is like a cabbage. To be sure, they say he did pretty well ; but when a man is always doing one thing, he ought to do it pretty well." There is no occasion to write the name under this criticism, and the best answer to it is that it is true—his pictures always are the same, but we never wish them to be otherwise. Perfection is one thing. I confess I think that Claude knew this, and felt that his were the finest landscapes in the world—that ever had been, or would ever be.

I am not in the humour to pursue this argument any farther at present, but to write a digression. If the reader is not already apprised of it, he will please to take notice that I write this at Winterslow. My style there is apt to be redundant and excursive. At other times it may be cramped, dry, abrupt ; but here it flows like a river, and overspreads its banks. I have not to seek for thoughts or hunt for images : they come of themselves, I inhale

them with the breeze, and the silent groves are vocal with a thousand recollections—

And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf, and cling to ev'ry bough.

Here I came fifteen years ago,¹ a willing exile; and as I trod the lengthened greensward by the low woodside, repeated the old line,

My mind to me a kingdom is!

I found it so then, before, and since; and shall I faint, now that I have poured out the spirit of that mind to the world, and treated many subjects with truth, with freedom, and power, because I have been followed with one cry of abuse ever since *for not being a Government tool*? Here I returned a few years after to finish some works I had undertaken, doubtful of the event, but determined to do my best; and wrote that character of Millimant² which was once transcribed by fingers fairer than 'Aurora's, but no notice was taken of it, because I was not a Government tool, and must be supposed devoid of taste and elegance by all who aspired to these qualities in their own persons. Here I sketched my account of that old honest Signior Orlando Friscobaldo,³ which with its fine, racy, acrid tone that old crab-apple, Gifford, would have relished or pretended to relish, had I been a Government tool! Here, too, I have written *Table-Talks* without number, and as yet without a falling-off, till now that they are nearly done, or I should not make this boast. I could swear (were they not mine) the thoughts in many of them are founded as the rock, free as air, the tone like an Italian picture. What then? Had the style been like polished steel, as

¹ Or even earlier, for he was there in 1809. See *Memoirs*, i., cap. 12.—ED.

² See *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 1819, pp. 139–42.—ED.

³ See *Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, &c., 1820, pp. 114–18.—ED.

firm and as bright, it would have availed me nothing, for I am not a Government tool ! I had endeavoured to guide the taste of the English people to the best old English writers ; but I had said that English kings did not reign by right divine, and that his present Majesty was descended from an Elector of Hanover in a right line ; and no loyal subject would after this look into Webster or Decker because I had pointed them out. I had done something (more than anyone except Schlegel) to vindicate the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* from the stigma of French criticism : but our Anti-Jacobin and Anti-Gallican writers soon found out that I had said and written that Frenchmen, Englishmen, men were not slaves by birthright. This was enough to *damn* the work. Such has been the head and front of my offending. While my friend Leigh Hunt was writing the *Descent of Liberty*,¹ and strewing the march of the Allied Sovereigns with flowers, I sat by the waters of Babylon and hung my harp upon the willows. I knew all along there was but one alternative—the cause of kings or of mankind. This I foresaw, this I feared ; the world see it now, when it is too late. Therefore I lamented, and would take no comfort when the Mighty fell, because we, all men, fell with him, like lightning from heaven, to grovel in the grave of Liberty, in the sty of Legitimacy ! There is but one question in the hearts of monarchs,—whether mankind are their property or not. There was but this one question in mine. I had made an abstract, metaphysical principle of this question. I was not the dupe of the voice of the charmers. By my hatred of tyrants I knew what their hatred of the freeborn spirit of man must be, of the semblance, of the very name of Liberty and Humanity. And while others bowed their heads to the image of the BEAST, I spat upon it and buffeted it, and made mouths at it, and pointed at it, and drew aside the veil that then half concealed it but has

¹ Published in 1815, 8vo.—ED.

been since thrown off, and named it by its right name ; and it is not to be supposed that my having penetrated their mystery would go unrequited by those whose darling and whose delight the idol, half-brute, half-demon, was, and who were ashamed to acknowledge the image and superscription as their own ! Two half-friends of mine, who would not make a whole one between them, agreed the other day that the indiscriminate, incessant abuse of what I write was mere prejudice and party spirit, and that what I do in periodicals and without a name does well, pays well, and is “cried out upon in the top of the compass.” It is this indeed that has saved my shallow skiff from quite foundering on Tory spite and rancour ; for when people have been reading and approving an article in a miscellaneous journal, it does not do to say when they discover the author afterwards (whatever might have been the case before) it is written by a blockhead ; and even Mr. Jerdan recommends the volume of *Characteristics*¹ as an excellent little work, because it has no cabalistic name in the titlepage, and swears “there is a first-rate article of forty pages in the last number of the *Edinburgh* from Jeffrey’s own hand,” though when he learns against his will that it is mine, he devotes three successive numbers of the *Literary Gazette* to abuse “that strange article in the last number of the *Edinburgh Review*.” Others who had not this advantage have fallen a sacrifice to the obloquy attached to the suspicion of doubting, or of being acquainted with anyone who is known to doubt, the divinity of kings. Poor Keats paid the forfeit of this *leze majesté* with his health and life. What, though his verses were like the breath of spring, and many of his thoughts like flowers—would this, with the circle of critics that beset a throne, lessen the crime of their having been praised in the *Examiner* ? The lively and most agreeable

¹ Published in 1823, 12mo. It ran through three editions, and will be included in the present series.—ED.

editor of that paper has in like manner been driven from his country and his friends who delighted in him, for no other reason than having written the *Story of Rimini*, and asserted ten years ago, "that the most accomplished prince in Europe was an Adonis of fifty!"¹

Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse!

I look out of my window and see that a shower has just fallen: the fields look green after it, and a rosy cloud hangs over the brow of the hill; a lily expands its petals in the moisture, dressed in its lovely green-and-white; a shepherd-boy has just brought some pieces of turf with daisies and grass for his young mistress to make a bed for her skylark, not doomed to dip his wings in the dappled dawn—my cloudy thoughts draw off, the storm of angry politics has blown over—*Mr. Blackwood*, I am yours—*Mr. Croker*, my service to you—*Mr. T. Moore*, I am alive and well—Really, it is wonderful how little the worse I am for fifteen years' wear-and-tear, how I came upon my legs again on the ground of truth and nature, and "look abroad into universality," forgetting that there is any such person as myself in the world!

I have let this passage stand (however critical) because it may serve as a practical illustration to show what authors really think of themselves when put upon the defensive—(I confess, the subject has nothing to do with the title at the head of the Essay!)—and as a warning to those who may reckon upon their fair portion of popularity as the reward of the exercise of an independent spirit and such talents as they possess. It sometimes seems at first sight as if the low scurrility and jargon of abuse by which it is attempted to overlay all common sense and decency

¹ Can it be repeated too often that the Hunts were subjected to the most tyrannical prosecutions and the most ruinous fines for making this statement in the *Examiner*?—ED.

by the tissue of lies and nicknames, everlastingly repeated and applied indiscriminately to all those who are not of the regular Government party, was peculiar to the present time, and the anomalous growth of modern criticism ; but if we look back, we shall find the same system acted upon as often as power, prejudice, dulness, and spite found their account in playing the game into one another's hands—in decrying popular efforts, and in giving currency to every species of base metal that had their own conventional stamp upon it. The names of Pope and Dryden were assailed with daily and unsparing abuse; the epithet A. P. E.¹ was levelled at the sacred head of the former; and if even men like these, having to deal with the consciousness of their own infirmities and the insolence and spurns of wanton enmity, must have found it hard to possess their souls in patience, any living writer amidst such contradictory evidence can scarcely expect to retain much calm steady conviction of his own merits, or build himself a secure reversion in immortality.

However one may in a fit of spleen and impatience turn round and assert one's claims in the face of low-bred, hireling malice, I will here repeat what I set out with saying, that there never yet was a man of sense and proper spirit who would not decline rather than court a comparison with any of those names whose reputation he really emulates—who would not be sorry to suppose that any of the great heirs of memory had as many foibles as he knows himself to possess—and who would not shrink from including himself or being included by others in the same praise that was offered to long-established and universally-acknowledged merits, as a kind of profanation. Those who are ready to fancy themselves Raphaels and Homers are very inferior men indeed—they have not even an idea of the mighty names that “they take in vain.” They are as deficient in pride as in modesty, and have not so much

¹ Alexander Pope, *Esquire*.—ED.

as served an apprenticeship to a true and honourable ambition. They mistake a momentary popularity for lasting renown, and a sanguine temperament for the inspirations of genius. The love of fame is too high and delicate a feeling in the mind to be mixed up with realities—it is a solitary abstraction, the secret sigh of the soul—

It is all one as we should love
A bright particular star, and think to wed it.

A name “fast-anchored in the deep abyss of time” is like a star twinkling in the firmament, cold, silent, distant, but eternal and sublime; and our transmitting one to posterity is as if we should contemplate our translation to the skies. If we are not contented with this feeling on the subject, we shall never sit in Cassiopeia’s chair, nor will our names, studding Ariadne’s crown or streaming with Berenice’s locks, ever make

the face of heaven so bright,
That birds shall sing, and think it were not night.

Those who are in love only with noise and show, instead of devoting themselves to a life of study, had better hire a booth at Bartlemy Fair, or march at the head of a recruiting regiment with drums beating and colours flying!

It has been urged, that however little we may be disposed to indulge the reflection at other times or out of mere self-complacency, yet the mind cannot help being conscious of the effort required for any great work while it is about it, of

The high endeavour and the glad success.

I grant that there is a sense of power in such cases, with the exception before stated; but then this very effort and state of excitement engrosses the mind at the time, and leaves it listless and exhausted afterwards. The energy we exert, or the high state of enjoyment we feel, puts us

out of conceit with ourselves at other times : compared to what we are in the act of composition, we seem dull commonplace people, generally speaking ; and what we have been able to perform is rather matter of wonder than of self-congratulation to us. The stimulus of writing is like the stimulus of intoxication, with which we can hardly sympathise in our sober moments, when we are no longer under the inspiration of the demon, or when the virtue is gone out of us. While we are engaged in any work, we are thinking of the subject, and cannot stop to admire ourselves ; and when it is done, we look at it with comparative indifference. I will venture to say, that no one but a pedant ever read his own works regularly through. They are not *his*—they are become mere words, waste-paper, and have none of the glow, the creative enthusiasm, the vehemence, and natural spirit with which he wrote them. When we have once committed our thoughts to paper, written them fairly out, and seen that they are right in the printing, if we are in our right wits, we have done with them for ever. I sometimes try to read an article I have written in some magazine or review—(for when they are bound up in a volume, I dread the very sight of them)—but stop after a sentence or two, and never recur to the task. I know pretty well what I have to say on the subject, and do not want to go to school to myself. It is the worst instance of the *bis repetita crambe* in the world. I do not think that even painters have much delight in looking at their works after they are done. While they are in progress, there is a great degree of satisfaction in considering what has been done, or what is still to do—but this is hope, is reverie, and ceases with the completion of our efforts. I should not imagine Raphael or Correggio would have much pleasure in looking at their former works, though they might recollect the pleasure they had had in painting them ; they might spy defects in them (for the idea of unattainable perfection still keeps

pace with our actual approaches to it), and fancy that they were not worthy of immortality. The greatest portrait-painter the world ever saw used to write under his pictures, "*Titianus faciebat*," signifying that they were imperfect; and in his letter to Charles V. accompanying one of his most admired works, he only spoke of the time he had been about it. Annibal Caracci boasted that he could do like Titian and Correggio, and, like most boasters, was wrong.¹

The greatest pleasure in life is that of reading, while we are young. I have had as much of this pleasure as perhaps anyone. As I grow older, it fades; or else, the stronger stimulus of writing takes off the edge of it. At present, I have neither time nor inclination for it: yet I should like to devote a year's entire leisure to a course of the English Novelists; and perhaps clap on that sly old knave, Sir Walter, to the end of the list. It is astonishing how I used formerly to relish the style of certain authors, at a time when I myself despaired of ever writing a single line. Probably this was the reason. It is not in mental as in natural ascent—intellectual objects seem higher when we survey them from below, than when we look down from any given elevation above the common level. My three favourite writers about the time I speak of were Burke, Junius, and Rousseau. I was never weary of admiring and wondering at the felicities of the style, the turns of expression, the refinements of thought and sentiment: I laid the book down to find out the secret of so much strength and beauty, and took it up again in despair, to read on and admire. So I passed whole days, months, and I may add, years; and have only this to say now, that as my life began, so I could wish that it may end. The last time I tasted this luxury in its full perfection was one day after a sultry day's walk in summer between

¹ See his spirited Letter to his cousin Ludovico, on seeing the pictures at Parma.

Farnham and Alton. I was fairly tired out ; I walked into an inn-yard (I think at the latter place) ; I was shown by the waiter to what looked at first like common out-houses at the other end of it, but they turned out to be a suite of rooms, probably a hundred years old—the one I entered opened into an old-fashioned garden, embellished with beds of larkspur and a leaden Mercury ; it was wainscoted, and there was a grave-looking, dark-coloured portrait of Charles II. hanging over the tiled chimneypiece. I had *Love for Love*¹ in my pocket, and began to read ; coffee was brought in in a silver coffee-pot ; the cream, the bread and butter, everything was excellent, and the flavour of Congreve's style prevailed over all. I prolonged the entertainment till a late hour, and relished this divine comedy better even than when I used to see it played by Miss Mellon, as *Miss Prue* ; Bob Palmer, as *Tattle* ; and Bannister, as honest *Ben*. This circumstance happened just five years ago, and it seems like yesterday. If I count my life so by lustres, it will soon glide away ; yet I shall not have to repine, if, while it lasts, it is enriched with a few such recollections !

¹ Congreve's play.—ED.

END OF PART I.

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